# SANDMAN

#103

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

# COMICS INTERVIEW

WE NAIL NIGHTMARISH
**NEIL GAIMAN**
FROM SANDMAN TO
BOOKS OF MAGIC
— AND BATMAN!

**DICK AYERS**
MEMORIES OF THE
EARLY MARVEL AGE

A GOLDEN AGE GAB WITH
**JIM MOONEY**

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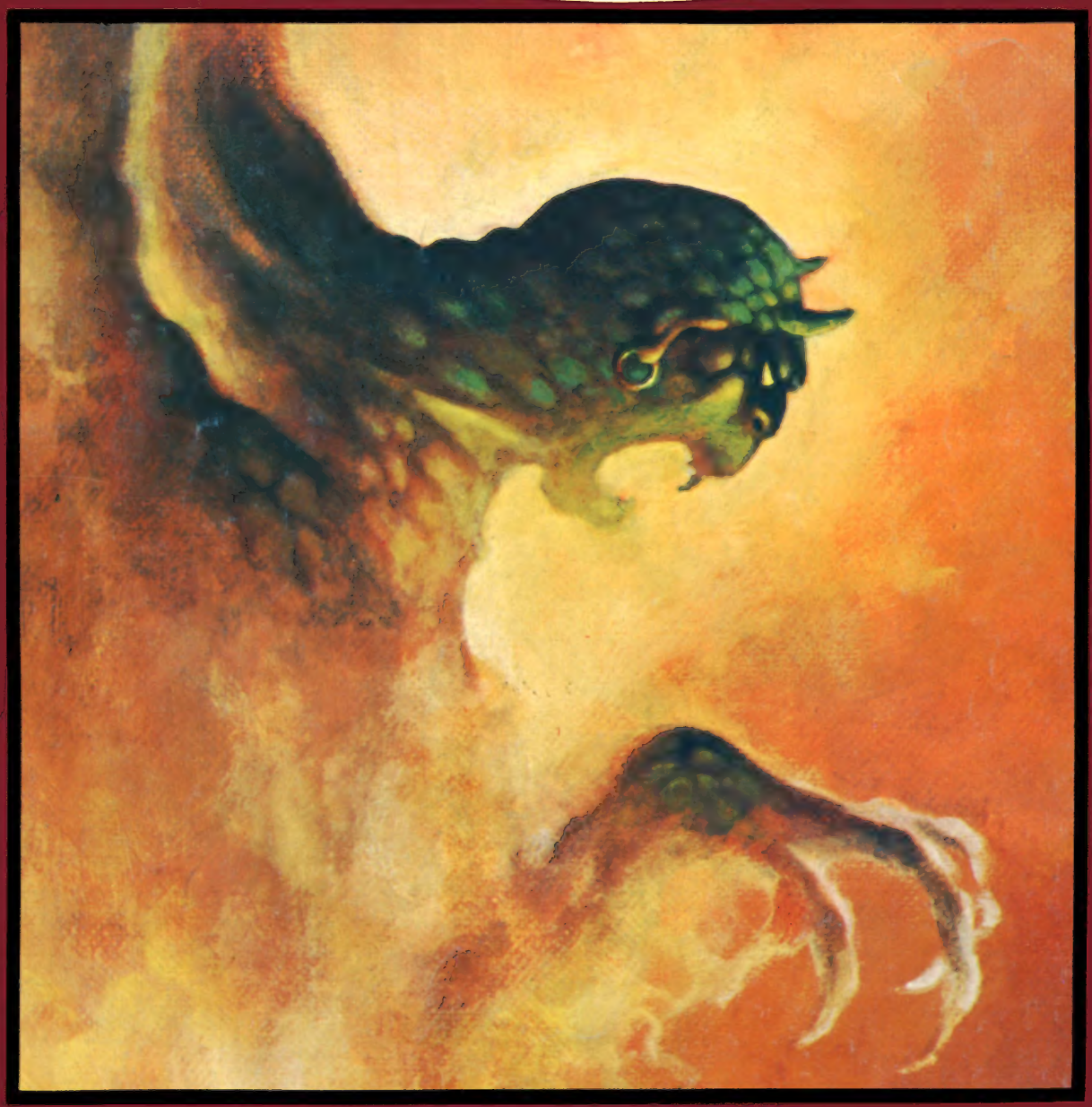

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*cover painting by:*
STEVE FABIAN

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# UP FRONT

*In the issues leading up to #100, I asked for responses to a survey about COMICS INTERVIEW magazine. To my delight, a deluge of constructive criticism and creative feedback resulted. A representative selection of those responses appears here:*

***What I Hate Most About COMICS INTERVIEW Is —***

"Hate is too strong a word since there is very little I dislike. Maybe a longer letters section . . ."

"Honestly, I can't think of a thing."

"Too much movie coverage. My biggest problem, actually, has been getting my issue from my distributor, Diamond."

"When you interview a big name in comics and the interview barely is 10 pages long."

"Interviews with unknowns."

"Questions that have nothing to do with the subject matter, and the cozy relationship you have with certain artists and writers."

"The Fantagraphics catalogue in #92."

"Black and white. Go with more color."

"Not enough interviews with independent artists and writers."

"I never know half of these dudes!? I suppose you can't interview **Miller/Sienkiewicz/Claremont/**etc. *every month*, which I understand."

"What I like least is the lack of inventive presentation of pages, and the lack of inventive questioning in many interviews."

"I hate short interviews and two-part interviews when a major artist is involved. I liked your **Adams** issue because serious attention was paid to a big-name artist."

"Lack of timeliness of some interviews."

"I don't hate anything, but I very much dislike when an interviewer knows next to nothing about who he or she is interviewing."

"I can't really think of anything that I hate. Maybe adding some late-breaking news, but basically the format is great. Just keep up the quality of art (sketches, pencils, roughs) and quality of interviews and I'll keep reading."

*Next: If I Could Change or Re-Arrange CI I'd —*

— DAVID

# CONTENTS


*EDITORIAL:* **UP FRONT**
a rap with *dak*

3

*WRITER:*
**NEIL GAIMAN**
from *miracleman* thru *books of magic* and *sandman* to *batman* — and beyond

4

*ARTIST:* **DICK AYERS**
memories of the early marvel age and more

19

*ARTIST:* **JIM MOONEY:**
from golden age comics to the original *supergirl* to vintage *spider-man*

30

*ARTIST:*
**JOHN DIXON:**
the australian artist of *air hawk* and many another — in part two of an amazing interview

44

*LETTERS:*
**THE LAST WORD**
*john byrne*, marvel's *lou bank*, fantagraphics' *gary groth* and *kim thompson* on the "power 100"

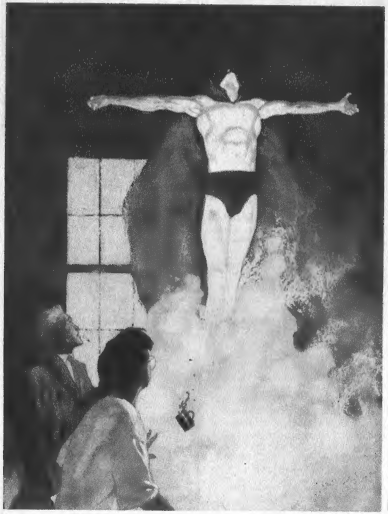
56

"There weren't any comics being written for

# NEIL GAIMAN

*Talking to Neil Gaiman may be a bit intimidating at first. Dark hair, dark glasses, and his trademark black T-shirt — at first glance, one might confuse Gaiman with his four-color alter ego, The Sandman. There's more than a passing resemblance.*

*Once he starts talking, however, the real Gaiman persona begins to emerge: intelligent, outspoken, and a sense of humor that is as black as his collection of shirts. During a recent visit to New York, Neil took the time to talk about some of his current projects, including MIRACLEMAN, BOOKS OF MAGIC, and of course, SANDMAN . . .*



**NEIL GAIMAN:** The only questions that will not even get a sensible answer from me anymore are any questions along the lines of "How did you get into comics," or "How did you get your start?" The best response I can give you is "Look at some other interviews and find out. I'm sick of telling people." It's how every interview starts.

**WHITLEY O'DONNELL:** *Well, I know you started out as a journalist, and that you wrote the book about "Hitchhikers," but somewhere in there should be a link between your journalistic work and your first comics assignment.*

**NEIL:** There wasn't really a link, except that I wanted to write comics. To some extent, there was a sort of progressive edge over. I was one of the few journalists in London writing about comics, one of

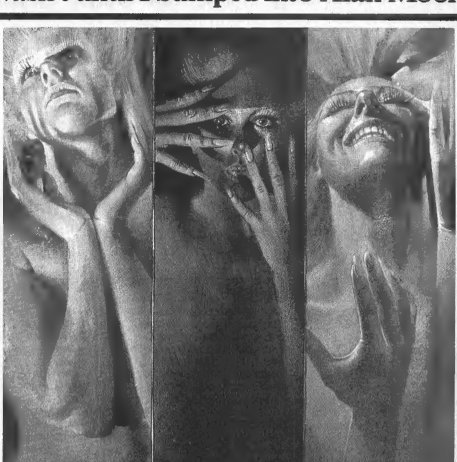
## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Neil Gaiman
**Born:** 10 November 1960
**Occupation:** Writer
**Influences:** Lou Reed, Stephen Sondheim, James Branch Cabell
**Favorite Book:** THE BIOGRAPHY OF MANUEL by James Branch Cabell
**Favorite Movie:** ALL THAT JAZZ
**Pet Peeve:** Mornings
**Tends To Accumulate:** Black T-shirts



Spectre, Black Orchid, Swamp Thing, Batman, Sandman, Adam Strange, Doctor Occult, Mr. E, John Constantine, Madame Xanadu, Nightmaster, and BOOKS OF MAGIC ©1991 DC Comics / Miracleman is a ™ of Eclipse. Gaiman, Buckingham. All art ©1991 Buckingham.

# me—it wasn't until I bumped into Alan Moore."



**Facing page: Beautiful panel from BOOKS OF MAGIC Book 2, painted by Scott Hampton. At right: Details from all three cover paintings from Gaiman's BLACK ORCHID limited series.**

the very first. I think I had the first article on things like WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT in any of the national papers, and I did a huge piece in TIME OUT on comics in 1986, well before anyone else was doing it. I wasn't a very good journalist, and I was only too happy to get out. What I had originally wanted to do was write comics; that was when I was about 14 or 15. I couldn't work out how you wrote American comics; I asked my school's career advisor, and they suggested accountancy. They couldn't work it out either. Then I wasn't interested in comics anymore. There weren't any comics being written for me, and it wasn't until I bumped into what **Alan Moore** was doing on SWAMP THING in 1983 that all of a sudden, somebody was writing a comic book for me, and it rekindled all the desire I ever had to write comics. I was looking at this thing saying, "This is every bit as mature and sophisticated as anything being done in mainstream fiction or in the wonderful wacky world outside, and it's comics. Suddenly, the whole desire to do comics came back in a flood.

**WHITLEY:** *You mentioned American comics. You had no interest in British comics at that time?*

**NEIL:** No, I've never been interested in doing British comics, but bear in mind that when I was 14, 2000 AD hadn't even started, and there weren't any British comics. The stuff I liked was the original run of SWAMP THING, the short good run of PHANTOM STRANGER, WARLOCK, and the strange comics that came out of the early '70s.

**WHITLEY:** *Was the fact that most of those comics were produced by DC related to your working for them now?*

**NEIL:** No, it mostly had to do with the fact that DC had been pillaging and plundering our shores, and draining the best of the British talent, working for the Yankee dollar. The first thing I did was

# "I started listing really obscure characters."

Detail of John Totleben's cover painting from Neil's only SWAMP THING.

VIOLENT CASES, and that was done for Titan in the UK. **Dave McKean** and myself were about halfway through with VIOLENT CASES — I was finished writing it, and he was halfway through drawing it — when we heard that **Karen Berger** and **Dick Giordano** were over talent scouting. I got hold of Dick's number, rang him up, and said "Can we come see you?" We went up . . .

**WHITLEY:** *This is you and Dave?*

**NEIL:** This was me and Dave. We went up, showed them the stuff we were doing, they said, "We love it. What do you want to do?" I started listing characters, and they said, "No, they're taken." I started listing really obscure characters, and they said, "No, somebody's doing them." In desperation, I said Black Orchid, and **Karen Berger** said, "Black Hawk Kid — who's he?" and I knew I was in business.

**WHITLEY:** *You had gotten as obscure as you can get.*

**NEIL:** Exactly. It was going to be that, Brother Power the Geek, or Element Girl.

**WHITLEY:** *Did you already have a storyline in mind for Black Orchid, or was that just a shot in the dark?*

**NEIL:** Oh, it was a wild shot in the dark. The only thing that Black Orchid had going for her was that nobody remembered her. She had three outings in ADVENTURE COMICS in 1973, and then ran for a couple of issues as a backup in PHANTOM STRANGER, and then disappeared. She was also a complete and utter cipher; that was one of the good things about her, was that she didn't have an origin, she didn't have a secret identity; we didn't know anything about her. She was just this purple lady in a costume who would fly down, infiltrate a criminal organization, then fly away at the end and people would say, "Gee, bullets fly off that flying dame!" She did this three times, and that was it. Bye bye, Black Orchid.

**WHITLEY:** *Since Dave was with you at this meeting, he knew that he was being roped into this project as well?*

**NEIL:** We went down to the hotel bar after they said Black Orchid, and Dave looked at me and said, "What have you got me into? Do I have to draw two hundred pages of cheesecake?" I said I'd like to do something about the Amazon rain forests like we had been talking about, and that would be in there, too. I sat on the train on the way home, trying desperately to come up with something that would make BLACK ORCHID interesting, trying to get a handle on it.

**WHITLEY:** *What was the handle you finally came up with?*

**NEIL:** The way the train of thought went

# "I thought the costume was nice, and the name."

was something like: "What's interesting about Black Orchid?" I thought the costume was nice, this floaty purple costume, and the name Black Orchid, and those flowers she dropped from the sky. I thought maybe she was living in some sort of symbiotic existence, and maybe the costume is actually a plant or a flower. There was a pause, and then I thought, "Maybe she's a flower!" With the idea that maybe she was a blossom, I immediately had the sequence at the beginning of BLACK ORCHID #1, where one of them gets burned to death, and you see the next blossom opening up. I thought, "What a lovely image," and the next morning I phoned up Dave who was just graduating from art college and was still teaching three times a week. I phoned him up, and there was this queue of people waiting to use this pay phone, and they were staring at him with amazement because for 45 minutes, he was just standing there holding the phone, and it was just me, telling him the story of BLACK ORCHID.

**WHITLEY:** *What sort of relationship did you have with Dave, in terms of how the story was designed, the use of color for certain effect, and so forth?*

**NEIL:** It was both of us doing it. I suggested that we do natural things in bright colors, and dead things sort of monochromatic, and there was a progression through the book, from the cities to wildlife, from these tight little panels to the full bleeds. Dave took that one step further, and did the world outside in black and white, with natural things in full color. Also, it would bounce backwards and forwards, because by the time I was halfway through part two, I had seen the paintings that Dave had done for part one, so I then took some of those things and put them back into part two. It was feedback. Where BLACK ORCHID is concerned, it's very hard. All the pictures were drawn by Dave; all the dialogue is mine. The story is mine, but there's a lot more to it than that. Some of the panel transitions are mine, and some of them are Dave's. Some of the visual ideas were Dave's in book one, and then I went and put them back into books two and three.

**WHITLEY:** *Was it your idea to introduce other characters from the DC Universe into the story, or was that suggested to you by the editors at DC, in order to help sales on the book?*

**NEIL:** It was never DC; it was very much me. I think it was a combination of the thrill of being let loose in the sweet shop, and it was also a commercial decision. It wasn't a commercial decision from the viewpoint of selling it to the public, but rather to sell it to DC. That was why we didn't come up with something that was ours and try to sell it to DC. What we did was take an old DC character and say, "You'll own the project, and we're going to have these DC characters running through it."

**Burn sequence from Book One of BLACK ORCHID, by Dave McKean.**

**WHITLEY:** *Your choice of characters seemed quite a natural progression in the story.*

**NEIL:** None of them were forced. It was fun doing Lex Luthor, and rather than doing him as an evil monster, doing him as a businessman, with all the corporate evil that covers. Poison Ivy was wonderful to do. Swamp Thing was lovely to write.

**WHITLEY:** *Did you follow up some of the ideas about Arkham Asylum that were originally introduced by Alan*

# "If you're writing a novel, you can be halfway through it

*Moore in SWAMP THING? It seemed as though you, Alan, and Grant Morrison each enjoyed using Arkham and its residents as part of your respective stories.*

**NEIL:** To some extent I think it was independent from the three of us, which says something about mind set. Once I had written part two of BLACK ORCHID, which had that Arkham scene, I remember being at some launch party, and Grant was there. I said to him, "Hey, I've written this great scene in Arkham Asylum, and it's a wonderful place! I think I'll do a graphic novel there!" Grant looked a little hurt, and said *(imitating Morrison)* "I've just been putting together an outline for a graphic novel about Arkham myself, in which the lunatics take over the asylum, and they send for Batman." I said, "Oh — all right, you do it, then." I don't think it was me playing off Grant, or Grant playing off me. The attraction of Arkham is that it's the underside of the DC rock. You have this beautiful rock with all these heroes, and then you lift the rock and there are these things squirming about. Arkham is the place that they squirm.

**WHITLEY:** *And it just happened to be a rock that appealed to the three of you?*

**NEIL:** Yes. The point is that the underside of the rock appeals to the three of us.

**WHITLEY:** *Now at what point did DC realize they were onto something with BLACK ORCHID and talk to you about doing another book?*

**NEIL:** The way it worked was that we moved on to the next projects we got into because of DC's lack of faith in BLACK ORCHID. I had written ORCHID two and Dave was drawing ORCHID one when they phoned us up and said, "There's a problem." We said, "What's the problem," and they said, "Well, you're two guys that nobody's ever heard of, in a book about a character that nobody's ever heard of, and a female character at that. Female characters don't sell, and we've got to be in trouble." They had a solution, though, and we asked what it was. They said, "Dave can do this ARKHAM ASYLUM book with Batman in it. We're going to put BLACK ORCHID on hold; we'll finish it off, but then we'll sort of put it in inventory. Dave can do this Batman book and everyone will buy it because it's Batman, and everyone will know who Dave is. You can write a monthly book, and you'll be able to build up a monthly following, so that when we release BLACK ORCHID, somebody will read it." We didn't feel comfortable with it but we said, "You guys are the boss." I went away and put together SANDMAN, and then went back and wrote episode three of BLACK ORCHID — it may have been the other way around . . .

**WHITLEY:** *At what point did you come up with the new twist on the Sandman character? The character had been around in one form or another for many years, but you managed to take the concept in a radically different direction.*

**NEIL:** The way that it worked was that Dave and myself were working on BLACK ORCHID which was very linear, very prosaic, very grounded in reality. We tried to give it a very filmic quality, so all the characters were based on photographic references. It was very realistic. At one point, they said to us, "What do you want to do for your next project?" and I said, "It would be nice to do something as far from BLACK ORCHID as we can. How about doing something entirely set in dreams? You've got this '70s Sandman character —

**WHITLEY:** *The short-lived Jack Kirby version?*

**NEIL:** That's right. I said we could do him, and just do it realistically. The character was dumb and the stories were dumb, but I loved the concept of somebody who actually lived in dreams. That was mentioned to Karen, and then a few months later, she asked me what I'd like to do as a monthly book. I hadn't even thought of Sandman as a monthly book, so I said, "What about the Phantom Stranger?" and she said no, so I said, "What about the Demon?" and she said no, there was a pause, then we bounced back and forth, I listed off a pile of characters to her, and she said, "I'll ring you back." She rang me back and said, "Well, we don't like any of your ideas," which were all DC characters, but she said, "What about the Sandman; why don't you do him as a monthly book, but don't do the **Kirby** Sandman; just do any new one." That was that, and I went away and that was what I did. We had a hurricane, I remember, and I was typing up an outline, and then there was two weeks without electricity, and I spent those two weeks just thinking. When the power went on, I sat down and wrote about 40 pages of an outline, which was a fairly precise outline of the first eight issues, through to the meeting with Death. I sent it off to Karen, she wasn't sure about it. It was sort of sitting on her desk and Dick and Jenette asked her to see it, and she showed it to them and they liked it, so she said, "Well, I don't know, but they like it, so do it, we're in

# before you know what it's about or how it's going to work."

business."

**WHITLEY:** *You managed to come up with a very nice concept, insofar as it allowed you to do almost anything you wanted with the book.*

**NEIL:** I plotted out the first eight issues at the time chiefly because I didn't see us getting far beyond that. I figured we'd do eight issues, and after the eighth issue, someone at DC would ring me up and say, "It's a minor critical hit, but it's selling twenty thousand a month. We'll give you until the end of the year; go to issue twelve and we'll cancel it after issue twelve." I plotted to issue eight, and by then it was selling better than any DC horror title had ever sold, and it still does. It still sells a good twenty to thirty thousand more than anything comparable has ever sold for DC in the last few decades, and their viewpoint was that it obviously wasn't going to get cancelled, I sat down and took a look at what I had done so far, and what I wanted to do with the rest of it. That was very interesting, because there were a lot of things the fans obviously liked about the first eight issues and I thought I had two alternatives: either I could go back and do a lot more of the stuff the fans liked about the first eight issues, bringing in DC characters, what are Mr. Miracle's dreams like or Batman's dreams, and that kind of thing, or I could go off and do the kind of things that I wanted to do at that point which was stuff like "The Doll's House."

**WHITLEY:** *Which is the way you decided to go.*

**NEIL:** Yes, I decided I didn't want to get, I wanted to keep moving, and if nobody likes it, they'll go away and fine, we'll go down the tubes. In the meantime, what the hell? This is my comic, and I'll take it where I want to take it. That was what I did, and what happened was that we lost a few readers at the point where we started "The Doll's House" stuff. Sales dropped at that point, but then they also picked up. It was like we were losing some of the younger readers, but as we lost them, the older readers came in.

**WHITLEY:** *You use the character of the Sandman as a catalyst for your stories, rather than as the main character. It often seems that he is used as a narrator, appearing at the beginning and end of a story, but standing offstage the rest of the time.*

**NEIL:** In #20, he's not even in there at all! That is true to some extent, although "Season of Mists," which is an eight-part storyline, for almost all of the story, he is center stage. I was starting to miss him, and so it was, "Let's bring him out, let's

make him center stage and remind everybody he's still there. He does spend one issue off stage, though. **Matt Wagner** phoned me up, and Matt was doing the one issue that the Sandman isn't really in. He said, "Great, I'm going to do this fill-in issue," and there was a pause, and he said, "*Is* the Sandman in it?" and I said, "No." He said, "Well, put him in there, because I want to draw him!" So he's actually in there for a panel. That's true, though, there is a level on which SANDMAN the comic rather than the character was a device to tell stories. If I said a machine to tell stories, that would sound rather cold . . .

**WHITLEY:** *Do you consider these shorter stories, such as the ones you just wrote for "Dream Country," to be a means of recharging your batteries between the bigger, longer running stories?*

**NEIL:** They're normally not so much a matter of recharging batteries as they are while I'm working on a big plotline, I have story ideas that I can't use. I put them off until I get to the end of a big storyline when I have no desire to do another big one for quite awhile because they take a lot out of you. If you're writing a novel, you can be halfway through it or more before you know what it's about or how it's going to work. You get to the end and you realize how the end fits together, and you go back to chapter one and you plant all the clues that make it obvious how it's going to end. When you're working on a monthly comic, that's not feasible because apart from anything else, when you get to the part where you realize what it's all about and how it ends . . .

**WHITLEY:** *The early parts have already been printed.*

**NEIL:** Everybody's read them, and you can't go back and change them now. By the time I got to the end of "The Doll's House," I was writing the second-to-last episode, and I suddenly realized I didn't have a clue about what was going to happen in the last one. It's a little like jumping out of a plane and trying to knit yourself a parachute as you fall. Anyway, it's sort of nice to settle down and do some stories that begin and end in 24 pages.

**WHITLEY:** *Before we start talking about MIRACLEMAN, what happened to your plans for taking over SWAMP THING awhile ago?*

**NEIL:** What was going to happen at one point was that when Rick was leaving SWAMP THING, **Jamie Delano** and myself had agreed to take over the title,

# "Alan is a hard act to follow. MIRACLEMAN was

Sandman portrait by co-conspirator of the series Mike Dringenberg.

essentially on a turnabout basis. Neither of us could have taken on another monthly title, but what we could have done was to do three issues; I could do three issues, then Jamie could do three issues, so we would have done six issues a year, three every six months which we could have just about done. Unfortunately, the furor over the crucifixion issue occurred and it never happened. Both Jamie and myself just declined to do it.

**WHITLEY:** *Did you feel it was better to simply do something else?*

**NEIL:** I felt there were a number of reasons. Reason one, Rick was our friend. Reason two, I thought DC behaved very foolishly, and I found nothing offensive in the story. Also, I felt at the time that SWAMP THING was now compromised. One of the things about SANDMAN is that I will go as far as my imagination takes me, and nobody is going to tell me to rein in my imagination. With SWAMP THING, I'd feel like people were looking over my shoulder at all times to make sure that I wasn't going to tread on somebody's foot or whatever. So that was that, for us taking over SWAMP THING. It never happened, and **Doug Wheeler** came in instead. The only SWAMP THING I ever did was my SWAMP THING ANNUAL.

**WHITLEY:** *In which you used one of the only DC characters originally available to you at the beginning.*

**NEIL:** The main problem with that story was that halfway through writing it, the SWAMP THING #89 happened, and my enthusiasm for it went away. It was like in the first half, I was in there kicking and firing on all four cylinders, and then after that there was a very nasty taste in my mouth. Having said that, then I went in and did that little ten-pager about shaggy god stories, which was actually just all me and my response to what was

# the first and set the tone for superheroes in the '80s."

happening with Rick at that time and the crucifixion issue. I thought, "Well, let's see how blasphemous I can be then," and in that one story I think I managed to examine the use of the tree motif in every major religion, in the context of a lunatic ex-mad scientist and superhero having a conversation with a Venus fly trap. I felt I came out of it okay; that I had fun with.

**WHITLEY:** *How difficult was it, taking over for Alan Moore in MIRACLEMAN? Did you find Alan to be a tough act to follow?*

**NEIL:** Alan is a very hard act to follow. They're very large shoes to get into and carry on walking in, especially since MIRACLEMAN was the first and set the tone for superheroes in the 1980s. It's where it all started. THE WATCHMEN and everything that came after, it all goes back to MIRACLEMAN. He actually asked me to do it a couple of months before I met with DC and talked about doing BLACK ORCHID. We are going back a long time. It meant that I actually had a long time to think about it.

**WHITLEY:** *A lot more than six to eight months?*

**NEIL:** I had three years to think about it.

**WHITLEY:** *Did you know all along how Alan was going to end the series when he left?*

**NEIL:** Oh yes. During that same conversation, I said, "What are you going to do? How's it going to end?" and he said, "Well, how it's going to end is that Miracleman is going to take over the world, and he's going to make it into a perfect utopia, all peace and light and happiness, and there will be no war, no criminality, no danger of invasions from space, no insanity, no illness, and it will be a particularly perfect world, thus in one fell swoop I've taken away from you every device for telling superhero stories." What he was saying basically was that he was handing me a superhero comic that by definition at the point that he was handing it over to me, you cannot do any superhero comic stories, utopia comics. I found that concept fascinating, so that was where I started. There was also a level where what I wanted to do began to feed what Alan was doing. I told him what I was planning to do and we fed that back into the last few issues of MIRACLEMAN that he was doing.

**WHITLEY:** *The theme that seems to be running through MIRACLEMAN right now is something that Alan originally postulated in WATCHMEN, namely what would society be like if a character like Dr. Manhattan was in charge of it —*

**NEIL:** A benevolent dictatorship? I think to some extent that's true, but to be more precise, it's just about people. It's saying let's create a perfect society, or one if not perfect, a lot more interesting than the one we've got now. Lacking a lot of the sources of misery we have now, what is it like for people, what is it like to live there? What is it like to be a human being in a "utopia?"

**WHITLEY:** *Does this again push Miracleman as a character into the background, focusing instead on stories about people?*

**NEIL:** In Miracleman: "The Golden Age," Book Four of MIRACLEMAN, which is six stories, yes he is way in the background because he is God. This is about people on ground level, and he is eight miles high in a pyramid over London.

**WHITLEY:** *So you're going to gradually reintroduce elements of conflict into this perfect society?*

**NEIL:** It's a long period of time, and basically we get to see it evolve. It's like cutting slices out of a tree and seeing the circles. We move ten to twenty years down the line in "The Silver Age," where you have a huge community of young "Miracleb abies." All of the babies have grown up and what they've elected to take as their only role model is old Marvel Comics, the Stan and Jack Marvel Comics. One of the things they've done is build a huge replica of Manhattan in the middle of the Pacific and every morning, they have huge battles. They thump each other through buildings and pick up skyscrapers and hit each other. In the afternoon, they build it back up again and go off and do other stuff.

**WHITLEY:** *When did you start putting together the ideas for what would become BOOKS OF MAGIC?*

**NEIL:** What happened was that Karen rang me up and said, "We want to do a book which would be a WHO'S WHO and a guide and a history for all our magical characters, and which has a story. Instead of a WHO'S WHO of the DC Universe, it would be a comic and it would have a plot. Can you do it?" I

**From MIRACLEMAN #18 (Neil's second issue), with artwork by Mike Buckingham.**

THEY SAID ON "NEWSGROUND" THAT THAT SORT OF THINGS GOIN' TO BE HAPPENIN' MORE AND MORE
BAGS I GET BITTEN BY THE RADIOACTIVE SPIDER.
DON'T BE A PRAT, JASON. IF YOU GOT BITTEN BY A RADIOACTIVE SPIDER YOU'D DIE.
IN THE OLD DAYS, MAYBE, BACK WHEN THINGS WAS BORING, NOT ANY MORE.

# "Sandman is a writer's book. It doesn't matter who's on it."

laughed hollowly at her, said, "Don't be silly," and put the phone down. About 24 hours later, I was sitting around and I suddenly figured out how you could do it and a way of making it work. I rang Karen back, flushed with the enthusiasm of my own genius and said, "It can be done!" and she said great, and sent me a contract. Again, carried on by the enthusiasm of the project, I signed it and wound up writing it. In an alternate past, I would have said, "This is how you do it, now go and find someone to do it," but it turned out very well. **John Bolton** did an absolutely wonderful job on the first issue. The four issues, although they are actually one story, are very different in tone and in content. The first issue sets the scene, and it's all these full page spreads, and little poems and short stories, and beautiful **John Bolton** paintings, and it's very portentious. The second book is John Constantine taking an 11-year-old kid around America and introducing him to magical characters; and by definition, Constantine is doing them, he's deflating them the whole of the way, and playing them off against each other and it's very funny. I hope it's very funny; I thought it was funny when I wrote it. The third issue is Fairyland. Dr. Occult takes the kid to Fairyland and **Charles Vess** is drawing it, and it's a fairy tale. It's **Arthur Rackham** Comics, and it's quite magical. In the fourth book, Mr. E, who is an aging DC character who I've taken and worked over, takes the kid off to the future.

**WHITLEY:** *Isn't Mr. E an awfully obscure character?*

**NEIL:** Oh, he's too obscure for anybody. He's a character who appeared briefly in HOUSE OF SECRETS; a tall blind man with thick red glasses, and a white trenchcoat, a white suit and a white cane. He has a very pragmatic approach to good and evil, and justice and all that kind of thing. It's probably the most draconian view in comics. Even the Mr. A's and Rorschachs of this world can say, "If you do something bad, then you must be punished!" Mr. E would say, "Maybe one day you'll do something bad. I will kill you now so that never happens."

**WHITLEY:** *You try very hard to write stories that reflect the strength of their original artists — before doing BOOKS OF MAGIC, did you know who the four artists were that you'd be working with, and did you try to tailor the individual stories to their different talents?*

**NEIL:** One tries to play to the skills of one's artists. I've actually been very impressed by the way it's turned out so far, particularly the **Bolton** issue.

It's quite simply the best stuff **John Bolton's** ever done. There was a level on which this was an artists' book. SANDMAN is a writer's book. It doesn't matter who's on it.

**WHITLEY:** *Did you perceive BOOKS OF MAGIC as an artists' book, or did DC?*

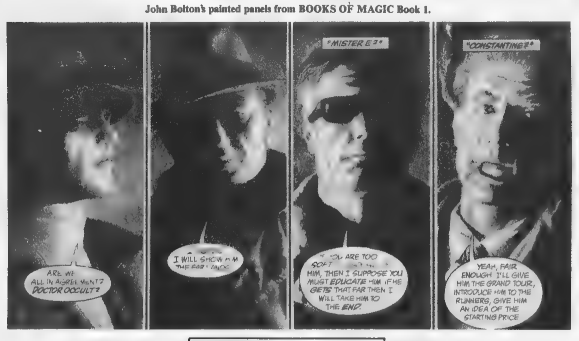
**NEIL:** I perceived it that way. It was how I wanted to do it. With SANDMAN, I'm at the front. I work out every panel progression, every line where everyone is standing. There's nothing accidental in SANDMAN, and if something is there, it's because I want it to be there. I am a benevolent dictator as far as SANDMAN is concerned. Those are the terms that it's done on. If you want to do an issue of SANDMAN, you're going to get 48 pages of closely-written script from me. That's how I want to do it. With BOOKS OF MAGIC, I sat down and wrote something that was vaguely like a film script. It was a film script written for them to tell the story as they wanted.

**WHITLEY:** *Let's talk a little about GOOD OMENS, the book you wrote with Terry Pratchett. I understand the book was originally entitled WILLIAM THE ANTICHRIST?*

**NEIL:** In a very early draft, yes. That was the first draft title; however, apart from anything else, the fact is that by the time we finished the book, the character was no longer named William. ADAM THE ANTICHRIST didn't have the same ring to it. With WILLIAM THE ANTICHRIST, you had William the Conqueror . . . that has a nice ring to it. Terry and I spent three weeks after we'd finished it, throwing titles back and forth at each other. It was terrible, the amount of awful titles we came up with, and then one day I phoned Terry up and said, "I've got it," and he said, "What?" and I said, "GOOD OMENS."

**WHITLEY:** *In the NEW YORK TIMES review of the book, there were several*

**John Bolton's painted panels from BOOKS OF MAGIC Book 1.**


ALL HIS ALL IN AGREEMENT DOCTOR OCCULT?
I WILL SHOW HIM THE REST OF FAIRY
"MISTER E?"
"CONSTANTINE?"
"... YOU ARE TOO SOFT ON HIM, THEN I SUPPOSE YOU MUST EDUCATE HIM. IF HE GETS THAT FAR THEN I WILL TAKE HIM TO THE END."
YEAH, FAIR ENOUGH. I'LL GIVE HIM THE GRAND TOUR, INTRODUCE HIM TO THE RUNNERS, GIVE HIM AN IDEA OF THE STARTING PIECE

# Queenan: "This guy is obviously an idiot."

UM I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING. THE PEOPLE HERE. NONE OF THEM ARE WEARING MASKS, ARE THEY?
NO
IT'S LIKE THERE'S A WHOLE OTHER WORLD, THAT I NEVER KNEW EXISTED, SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE OLD ONE.
YES AND ONCE YOU ENTER IT, YOU CAN NEVER LEAVE.
NEVER?
YOU HAVEN'T ENTERED IT YET, TIM. YOU'RE A GUEST.

**More Scott Hampton work from BOOKS OF MAGIC Book 2.**

***comparisons made between GOOD OMENS and the work of Douglas Adams. Do you think that's a valid comparison, or do you think the assessment actually limits the scope of your book?***

**NEIL:** I think that in America, people will look at it and compare it to **Douglas Adams,** because they look at it and say it's the same kind of thing. In England, people have a sense of the tradition of British humorist writing. I hate to sound sort of snotty at this point, but **Douglas Adams** did not emerge from a vacuum fully formed. We're talking about **P.G. Wodehouse,** here. We're talking about the people who wrote NO BED FOR BACON and NO MR. DISRAELI; books like that in the '40s. **Crompton,** who wrote the original "William" books. The style did not begin and end with **Douglas Adams.** He did not bring the style he was creating out of nowhere. To some extent, what he did was take **P.G. Wodehouse** and graft on some **Kurt Vonnegut,** if you're going to put it simplistically. Yes, Terry and myself both came out of the tradition of British humor writing. The book is written in the style of British humorist books; **Wodehouse, Jennings,** and of course **Douglas Adams,** because he is part of that tradition as well. In the UK, the book was also compared to **Tom Sharpe,** who's another recent satirical writer. Of course, you're going to get compared to **Douglas Adams;** it's flattering when you do. It's nice that even when attempting to do a rather peculiar hatchet job, the NEW YORK TIMES compared us to **Douglas Adams,** because **Douglas Adams** is the best selling man in the field and hopefully GOOD OMENS will do as well. Hopefully those people who run out and buy whatever **Douglas Adams** wrote will run out and buy GOOD OMENS too.

**WHITLEY:** *So rather than being flattered by it, you found it a left-handed compliment?*

**NEIL:** Okay, the bottom line on that review is that it was written by a man named **Whitley Queenan.** He's the same guy who did the article called "Drawing on the Dark Side" in the NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE stated **Alan Moore** was a fascist, and that BLACK ORCHID was about "mutant women forced to eat rats." He's also the man who threatened never to work for ROLLING STONE again if **Michael Gilmore's** article on comics was published, again because **Alan Moore** was a fascist. This guy is obviously an idiot; he's also apparently an idiot with an axe to grind.

**WHITLEY:** *Does he have an axe to grind with comic writers, or —*

**NEIL:** I have no idea. From what I can tell of the interview, he's also anglophobic. I'm sorry, it's just that the guy . . . he doesn't seem very bright —

**WHITLEY:** *— for someone who's writing for one of the most prestigious newspapers in the United States.*

**NEIL:** But then again, the other thing that I think is fascinating is that we got a full-page review in the NEW YORK TIMES, which means as far as they're concerned, it's a major book. That they gave it to an idiot to do a hatchet job on is neither here nor there.

**WHITLEY:** *You've been doing a lot of book signings over the last few months — what sort of response have you gotten to the book?*

**NEIL:** It's great. We've had one bad review so far, that was the NEW YORK

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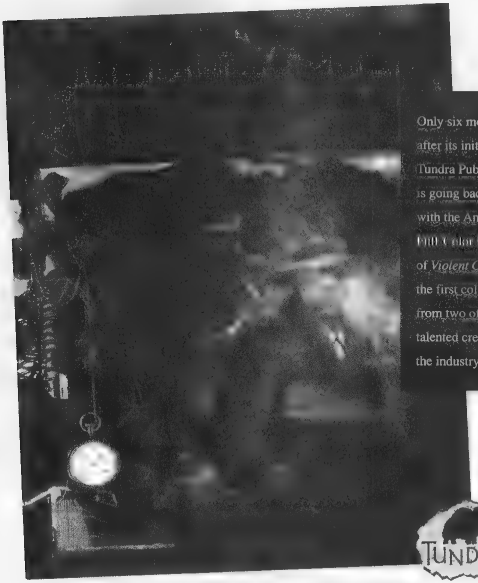

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# "I always wanted to send Batman to the circus."

From BOOKS OF MAGIC, Book 3 by Charles Vess (before the extensive coloring process).

TIMES. That was it.

**WHITLEY:** *The one that I decided to pick up on.*

**NEIL:** Well no, because what are you going to pick up on in the good reviews? They say it's wise and wonderful, and witty and funny, blah de blah de blah.

**WHITLEY:** *And you say, "That's true."*

**NEIL:** Yes, thank you very much. You say, "I'm flattered." No, the response is great. The book is apparently selling very well. You're talking about what is essentially a first novel with a 90,000 print run in hardcover. That is not to be sneezed at.

**WHITLEY:** *At the beginning of this interview, you mentioned that when you first met with Karen Berger, you gave her a list of DC characters you'd like to do, and for one reason or another, they were turned down. Are there any characters on that list you'd like another chance to do?*

**NEIL:** There's one project that I've been committed to for three years, which I will finally start writing in a few weeks, although it's been contracted and on the schedule since a year and a half before the BATMAN movie. It's a big Batman book with **Simon Bisley,** in which Batman goes to the circus. That will be fun. I always wanted to send Batman to the circus. Other than that, I think I've gotten to write or cameo pretty much every character I ever wanted to write. In fact, at one point for DC, I did an entire issue that got practically every DC character I ever wanted to write out of my system. It was the last ever issue of ACTION COMICS WEEKLY, which for various reasons after I wrote it was canned, and **Elliot Maggin** went in and did one. I did get to write this 48-page

# "There are a lot of projects in the offing, waiting for time."

script which contained my take on practically every DC character I ever wanted to write. Luckily, it's buried in a drawer somewhere, and no one will ever see it. They'll never see Superman getting the kitten down from the tree, and all the exciting stuff I had in it.

**WHITLEY:** *What's the status of the series you're supposed to be writing for TABOO?*

**NEIL:** Sweeney Todd? It will happen. It's formative right now, and there's a lot of research I have to do in the British Museum. I've actually gone in there and gone through their catalogues, and the British Museum does have a lot of stuff I need to read, but it's a *lot* of stuff, and we're talking Victorian documents. It's time, and also **Michael Zulli** who I'm doing it with is very busy right now. He's doing a long story for TABOO with **Ramsey Campbell,** and he's also doing a pile of Turtles stuff, so when he's finished with Mutant Ninja Turtles, we get in and slash a few throats.

**WHITLEY:** *What other projects do you have in the offing?*

**NEIL:** There are a lot of projects in the offing, waiting for the time. There's a project with **Matt Wagner** that Matt's going to fly up to Toronto to talk to me about while I'm there, which will be an interesting take on a very major DC character. It may or may not ever happen, but we want to talk it through, and play with some ideas for it. There's the Death miniseries which everybody wants me to do. *I* want me to do it, and get **Mike Dringenberg** to paint the whole thing. How it will happen I don't know, but the title of it is "The High Cost of Living." She's a lovely character and I'd love to do the book. It's off in the future.

There's also a novel called WALL that's off in the future. I've written five thousand words of it, but again, I've been forced to put it in a drawer. It's a rather strange fantasy novel.

There's various movie things that keep lurching around, which are forever lurching, and involve going off and drinking fizzy water with somebody in an expensive London club and then not coming up with anything. Having said

# "What I say about Batman will be in NIGHT CIRCUS."

that, we've just received an incredible offer from a major movie company for GOOD OMENS, and we have five other people bidding for it before the end of the week. That's going to be interesting.

**WHITLEY:** *I suppose in a better world that you and Terry would have some degree of control over it.*

**NEIL:** Every single offer that's come in so far — except one — has as one of *their* conditions that we write the script.

**WHITLEY:** *But again, we get back to the idea of time.*

**NEIL:** It's time. What else do we have in the future? Myself and **Pet Atkins** who wrote the HELLRAISER II movie, HELLBOUND, wrote one version of HELLRAISER III, and is now writing the second version — neither version of HELLRAISER III will pick up on the events of HELLRAISER I or II. They're new stories featuring Pinhead, and we've been waiting for about a year now about doing a story that ties up all the loose ends of the first two HELLRAISER movies. We've been sort of plotting it lazily together, and we may wind up doing it for Epic's HELLRAISER title.

**WHITLEY:** *That's one way to sneak into Marvel through the back door.*

**NEIL:** I've actually done a HELLRAISER story for Marvel. I wrote it 18 months ago, but I'm waiting for **Dave McKean** to find time to paint it. It's a very nasty story about a crossword puzzle that's a Lament configuration and the crossword puzzle clues are not actually linguistic clues; they're action clues.

What else? Oh, "Signal to Noise," the strip that **Dave McKean** and I did that was serialized in THE FACE, has been sold to Gollancz, and we're going to be expanding that in a collected book from them, and then we've got the book we're going to do together after that for Gollancz. It's already been contracted for, and it has a working title of MR. PUNCH. Dave and I are also talking about doing a Sandman graphic novel for DC, because they were bidding for "Signal to Noise," but for various reasons having to do with publishing territories they wound up losing out. We felt a little bit bad about that, and we wanted to make it up to them by doing a Sandman graphic novel. They were terribly nice about it, and they offered us more money for "Signal to Noise" than they had ever offered anyone, they offered us more creative control than they've ever offered anybody, and the project actually foundered because they and Gollancz in the UK could not agree over publishing territories. We already had a commitment to go with Gollancz on it, so it wasn't really anybody's fault. **Archie Goodwin**, Jenette and Paul did everything they could to make it happen, and we said, "Well, we'll do a graphic novel for them, make them happy."

**WHITLEY:** *Do you find it exhilarating, knowing that you've got enough material to keep you busy for the next few years, or is it more a source of frustration, not having the time to do everything you want to do?*

**NEIL:** It's frustrating, except for SANDMAN, of course. The joy of SANDMAN is writing it every month, and also "Signal to Noise." The joy of "Signal to Noise" was that once every month I'd sit down and write the next four pages. Wherever I was at that month, that was what I'd do, and if I wanted to do it in a different style, or Dave wanted to use a different visual style, it was like "Signal to Noise" was a series of polaroids of where we were at the time.

Dave came up to me recently before we were talking about doing the Sandman graphic novel, and he wanted to buy a new house, and he said, "Let's do a LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT. We can do five issues, **Gaiman** and **McKean;** think of the money," and I thought about it, that I could buy a new house, and Dave could buy a new house, it wouldn't take long to do, and so forth. I thought about it, and I rang Dave up and said, "No, I can't do it. The only reason to do it would be the money." Anything I have to say about Batman will be in the NIGHT CIRCUS. I love working with Dave, but his heart wouldn't be in it. He spent the entirety of ARKHAM trying to do this book without drawing Batman! People would ask how he got the idea of doing him as this dark mysterious figure you'd never see, and the answer is he didn't want to draw him. I just said no, and he said fine, and we decided to do this Sandman thing instead.

**WHITLEY:** *So the new house will have to wait a little longer.*

**NEIL:** If I was doing this for the money, I would go to Hollywood, or frankly, I would put everything aside and write WALL, because there are an awful lot of publishers out there salivating at the idea of a **Neil Gaiman** novel. It doesn't even matter if it's any good or not, they're still salivating.

**WHITLEY:** *But you're still willing to wait a while?*

**NEIL:** Yes, that's right.

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# "My father started me out with reading comics in the '30s."

*If you're a fan of the Silver Age, you probably remember Dick Ayers as the definitive artist on Marvel's SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS. Dick's place in comics history would be secure if only for that, and for being a mainstay of the '60s Marvel Bullpen, along with Stan Lee, Jack Kirby (whom he inked extensively on early FANTASTIC FOUR), Steve Ditko, and Don Heck.*

*But Dick has done a lot more than that, and has made a name for himself as one of the best western and war artists in the business. His magnum opus was probably THE GHOST RIDER for Magazine Enterprises in the early '50s, which he reprised in altered form for Marvel in the mid-'80s. Besides that, he was the main artist on Marvel's revived original HUMAN TORCH in 53-54, on MES THE AVENGER, and on a torrent of western and war tales for Marvel, as well as inking a slew of Kirby fantasy stories in the pre-hero days at Marvel. In the '60s, besides SGT. FURY, Dick was the artist of the Human Torch strip in STRANGE TALES and of the TWO-GUN KID. In the '70s he began working for DC, on JONAH HEX and the war line. Later on, his art appeared on Red Circle's SHIELD and, most recently, in AIDA-Zine, a Christian comic attracting many mainstream contributors. In the midst of all that he found time to work for Charlton, Prize, St. John, and Skywald, as well.*

*Thus, Dick Ayers is living comics history. And to learn some of that history, we gave him a call one day and caught it all on tape. Roll it, gang . . .*

**LOU MOUGIN:** *How did you get inspired to become a comic-book artist?*

**DICK AYERS:** When I was about ten years old, I guess, I started seeing FLASH GORDON and TERRY AND THE PIRATES.

**LOU:** *Yeah, those seem to be the ones that inspired —*

**DICK:** Most of us young guys at the time. Before that my father had started me out with reading the comics in the early '30s, BRINGING UP FATHER, and POPEYE and WASH TUBBS — WASH TUBBS was a favorite.

**LOU:** *Not too many people these days realize what good adventure strips those old humor strips were.*

**DICK:** Yeah. Then DICK TRACY came along.

**LOU:** *And after that you decided you wanted to become a comic-strip artist?*

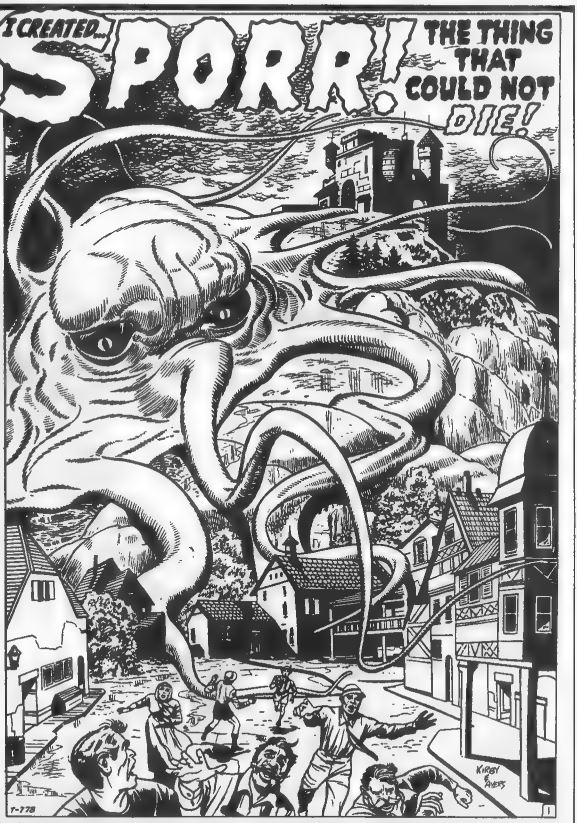
**DICK:** Mostly, yeah. Comic books weren't around, and then when they did come out they were reprints of what I had been reading. I had good luck. My grandfather was a railroad conductor. He went away for three days and when he came back there was a pile of newspapers with all the comics in them,

# DICK AYERS



Spoon, Night Rider / Ghost Rider, Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos ©1991 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. / Dr. Solar ©1991 Western Printing and Lithographing Inc. / Weird Western Tales and Jonah Hex ©1991 DC Comics, Inc. / The Original Shield ©1991 Archie Comics

**"I helped plot a lot of the stories. In fact, for most of them.**




**Shot directly from the original — the splash page from TALES OF SUSPENSE (May 1960) by Lee and Kirby, with Ayers on inks.**

# I'd have 23 pages to fill and a little synopsis to work from."

so I saw just about *everything!*

**LOU:** *This is going sketchy over the biography: I've got that you served with the Army Air Corps in World War II, and one of the credits I have for you — your first comic-book credit, I guess — is a 1942 strip for the Army Air Corps newspaper, RADIO RAY.*

**DICK:** How'd you find that out? *(Laughter.)* There was only one collector I told about that *years* back and he sought out to find a copy of RADIO RAY.

**LOU:** *Did he ever find it?*

**DICK:** I don't know, I suppose he did. It was in a newspaper called RADIO POST in Wisconsin.

**LOU:** *Exactly what kind of a strip was it?*

**DICK:** It was a pantomime. This was a school for radio mechanics and radio operators, so it was just the life-on-the-base type of thing.

**LOU:** *Kind of like JOE DOPE or something like that?*

**DICK:** Well, it was a *little* smarter than that. *(Laughter.)* It was like SAD SACK.

**LOU:** *Were you a radio operator?*

**DICK:** I started out being a radio mechanic, then I was assigned to a squadron and was going overseas and they needed a draftsman. I went to Tampa University for 30 days and got my spec number changed and became a draftsman. And that's about it, I was a squadron draftsman. I went to Britain and then over to Normandy, up into Holland, then Germany.

**LOU:** *You saw some action?*

**DICK:** Yeah, we had six campaigns; I served under Colonel Silk in the 386th Bomb Squadron, which was the 394th Bomb Group. There was an article in AIR AND SPACE that Smithsonian puts out called "Risque Business;" it's on painting nose art, and I did a lot of that.

**LOU:** *One of the things that comes to mind, when I hear your name, is SGT. FURY and the other war mags, and I guess you must have had a lot of experience in the Big One to draw upon?*

**DICK:** I helped plot a lot of the stories, in fact most of them. I'd have 23 pages and a little synopsis to work from, so there was plenty of room to slip some stuff in.

**LOU:** *Especially with Marvel style.*

**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *I'm really getting the cart ahead of the horse here.* (Laughter.) *When you got out of the Army you attended the Cartoonists and Illustrators School for a couple of years, is that right?*

**DICK:** No, that's a little bit off. I studied first at the Art Career School for about a year, then I went to try to make it in comics. That fell apart. *(Laughter.)* Then I noticed there was a school which **Burne Hogarth** was part of called Cartoonists and Illustrators, so I got into that. That was like in September, then the following April I got the **Jimmy Durante** book with Magazine Enterprises.

**LOU:** *I've got down your first job in comic books, and this may be wrong, was pencilling FUNNYMAN for Siegel and Shuster.*

**DICK:** Yeah, while I was going to school I did that.

**LOU:** *What was it like working with those guys?*

**DICK:** Oh, it was *great!* Also in the office there was **Marvin Stein,** the main one that did the pencilling and all that.

**LOU:** *Who was the editor at M.E. at that time, Vince Sullivan?*

**DICK: Ray Krank.**

**LOU:** *Okay. And you stayed with Magazine Enterprises for about ten years, I guess.*

**DICK:** Off and on, yeah, I did. It was freelance, so at the same time I was working for them I was working for Timely.

**LOU:** *I guess M.E. went under about the time you stopped working for them.*

**DICK:** M.E. lasted until '56 or '57; 1955 was the last time I worked for them.

**LOU:** *Well, the most famous strip you did for them, or the one I always recall, was the original GHOST RIDER. He was a pretty scary dude, and you co-created him as I hear it.*

**DICK:** I kind of helped design the costume but I wouldn't claim much of the creation; that was **Vince Sullivan** and **Ray Krank.** I don't remember who was the first writer was on it. I was in the office when they were kicking back and

**Dick on GHOST RIDER (renamed NIGHT RIDER in reprints)**

# "The first time I got a story from Marvel was about

forth what he would be like, what he would do, all that kind of stuff

**LOU:** *Was the impetus just to combine the horror and western things?*

**DICK:** I think the horror came later, the kind of horror that you're talking about. At first he was just a ghostly character that scared the bejesus out of everybody. *(Laughter.)* The big influence at that time was THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN that Disney put out.

**LOU:** *The strips I've seen of the old GHOST RIDER are really top-notch. What was it like working on that?*

**DICK:** Oh, I enjoyed working on GHOST RIDER. I'd do it again if I could.

**LOU:** *Only they'd call it NIGHT RIDER now.*

**DICK:** Yeah, they're reprinting some of the stuff under that name.

**LOU:** *Another strip you did for M.E., a really short-lived one, was THE AVENGER.*

**DICK:** I did one issue and then they switched it over to **Bob Powell.** It was BOBBY BENSON that I did . . . I don't know, issues #13 to #20.

**LOU:** *Yeah, I've got you down for a whole bunch of westerns. You were saddled, if you will excuse the pun, with so many westerns, I guess this was when the western was the most popular genre in comics.*

**DICK:** For a long time, yeah, and then the other westerns that I did over at Marvel, and then at the end there was JONAH HEX and SCALPHUNTER over at DC.

**LOU:** *Yeah, you were like* the *western artist through all that.*

**DICK:** I used to call myself at the end the **John Wayne** of comic books. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *On the case of JIMMY DURANTE, one of the things I always wanted to ask somebody who worked on one of the old adaptations was how did you adapt this guy to comics?*

**DICK:** Well, **Vince Sullivan** in the '30s, I think it was, did a strip called SCHNOZOLA, and so it was through him that was the contact with **Jimmy Durante.** They supplied me with photographs, and also my **Jimmy Durante** kind of looked like what **Vince Sullivan** drew. And then to get the *feel* I played his records all the time while I was working.

**LOU:** *Did you write it as well?*

**DICK:** No, **Ray Krank** wrote it. It was three issues, but I don't think the third one came out.

**LOU:** *Around '51 I've got you starting to work at Marvel, which was Timely back then. That was when Stan Lee was coming back to the company, right?*

**DICK:** I think so, yeah. Actually, because I've typed up a bibliography of every story I ever did, and the first time I did a story for Marvel was about 1948. It was in the summer, I was looking for work, and I think Stan was on vacation and somebody assigned me a detective story.

**LOU:** *For one of their crime books?*

**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *In the early '50s you did THE HUMAN TORCH in that really brief revival. How did you get handed that?*

**DICK:** I don't know, Stan just assigned it. It went along good, I adapted to it — I wasn't too *keen* on it at the time, a guy flaming up and flying around, burning like that. Then the censorship came along from that **Wertham** book and just

**Unpublished panel from DR. SOLAR. Pencils and inks by Mr. Ayers.**

# 1948. Somebody assigned me a detective story."

ON THE SHORES OF THE RAPPAHATTOX RIVER IN SOUTHERN VIRGINIA, ON THE NIGHT OF JUNE 29, 1862...
A CRACKLE OF DRIED WOOD BREAKING UNDER BOOTED FEET, THE SLOW INHALATION OF BREATH, THE CREAK OF LEATHER AS A MAN PROPS TO ONE KNEE, AND FINALLY, THE CLICK OF A COCKING GUN-HAMMER...
PARTNER, YOU SURELY ARE ONE HARD HOMBRE TO TRACK DOWN...
WEIRD WESTERN TALES #52. Written by Gerry Conway with art by Ayers and Luis Dominguez.
Featuring a character created by MIKE FLEISHER

the title alone killed the series.

**LOU:** *They were afraid kids would set themselves on fire to be like the Human Torch.*

**DICK:** They thought like that, yeah.

**LOU:** *Okay. You ended up working for a lot of other outfits, Charlton, Prize and so on, but Marvel was like your home base from the early '50s on.*

**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *Was this because of the big comics crunch about that time?*

**DICK:** Well, no; Stan kept supplying me the work as fast as I was getting it done, so I kept being faithful to him. And every once in awhile **Ray Krank** would start up with a GHOST RIDER again or something. Charlton just came along because it was at one of those inventory periods.

**LOU:** *Marvel managed to survive, of course, through the entire period — which was a nice thing for them to do. Besides the war books, which we'll get to in due time, can you tell me something about working on the Marvel westerns? I think you started with WYATT EARP.*

**DICK:** Did WYATT EARP come first, or was it THE RAWHIDE KID?

**LOU:** *The early original RAWHIDE KID, it might have been.*

**DICK:** I remember doing that before I did WYATT EARP. Because of the censorship thing they had to give up the Rawhide Kid with the whip, so the only thing I could think of to call him the Rawhide Kid was to put chaps on him, and he became just an ordinary cowpuncher.

**LOU:** *That's a new one on me. I didn't know that his name was the Rawhide Kid because of the whip.*

**DICK:** Yeah, and that was the fun part to draw. I'd have him snapping out the cigarettes and the cigars in the villains' mouths, tearing off the gunbelts, having them fall down.

**LOU:** *Right. Then TWO-GUN KID, that was the original Two-Gun Kid without the mask.*

**DICK:** I don't remember *doing* THE TWO-GUN KID, but I probably did.

**LOU:** *How did Marvel decide to bring back a refurbished GHOST RIDER back in 1967?*

**DICK:** Well, **Thomas** was working with Stan at that time and he was a fan of THE GHOST RIDER before he got into comics, so it just came about.

**LOU:** *Nobody had a copyright on it?*

**DICK:** No, that's another story. They printed that they had the copyright, I was told that they had the copyright, and I wanted to draw it just like I did before, but **Roy Thomas** changed it — you have read the *original* GHOST RIDER where Rex Fury was a federal marshal —

# "Sometimes I would get a synopsis that only gave part of

**LOU:** *Right.*

**DICK:** He could show up *anywhere* in the west. **Roy Thomas** came along and made up a new name and made him a school teacher, which kept him in the same place, in the same locale. And then the Marvel Ghost Rider got supernatural powers from some Indian or something. I helped in that department, where he went down in this whirlpool and then he saw in a delirium the ghost of **Wild Bill Hickock** and then he came out and more-or-less he did like the Shadow with trickery, ventriloquism and tricks. And that's where the Chinese fellow came from, to help him with the tricks.

**LOU:** *Which ended up being the kid in the 1967 version.*

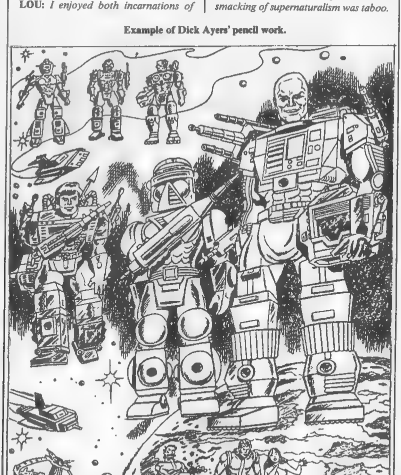
**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *I enjoyed both incarnations of THE GHOST RIDER, and I guess everybody else did.*

**DICK:** Yeah, I guess they did. Then they did just like they did with THE HULK, they put it away for awhile — I don't know why — to try again later. In the meantime, while it was put away, somebody came up with the idea of putting a character on a motorcycle and calling *him* the Ghost Rider, so when they went back to put him out again they were stuck, so they called him the Night Rider. Down at Magazine Enterprises we tried to think up a new title for him when that censorship thing came — but no way, it was THE GHOST RIDER and that was it!

**LOU:** *That was a pretty rocky time, to say the least, and anything the least bit smacking of supernaturalism was taboo.*

**Example of Dick Ayers' pencil work.**



**DICK:** Oh, the censorship was *rough.* You can't imagine what it was like drawing SGT. FURY where they had to sneak up behind some German sentry and clobber him; you'd have to show them creeping up behind him and then have the helmet fly through the air with a few exclamation marks, then show this guy unconscious. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *That sounds really weird, to say the least.*

**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *The last one before we get into the war books, you also took over THE HUMAN TORCH and GIANT-MAN at Marvel in the early '60s, working with Stan.*

**DICK:** Yeah. the new Human Torch was a lot more fun in that he had that limitation, seven minutes in the air and then he had to recharge or something, and he was a teenager.

**LOU:** *Yeah, I remember those. They were pretty fun, and plus you had a chance to work with the Thing, who was in those stories a pretty comical character himself.*

**DICK:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *Okay. I guess the* major *strip most of us remember you working on was SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS, and I want to know a lot* about that one. How was it that Stan tapped you to work on it following Jack Kirby?

**DICK:** Well, I'd done a lot of war stories and Jack was starting to get too busy with FANTASTIC FOUR and whatever, so he just started assigning me SGT. FURY. Also, I'm dependable on being able to meet the deadlines all the time. I never missed one.

**LOU:** *In fact you were inking Jack on that title as well as a ton of other things before you took over the pencilling.*

**DICK:** Yeah, I did SGT. FURY as an inker for awhile.

**LOU:** *What was it like inking Jack? You two seemed to really mesh well there for many years.*

**DICK:** Oh, yeah, I kept very busy.

**LOU:** *What was it like Stan handing you a short plot, maybe a couple of lines, and then you building it into a story?*

**DICK:** Like you were saying, the synopsis that I would get was just a few short lines, that's all — or a conversation on the telephone like we're talking, and I don't take shorthand. *(Laughter.)* I would just keep tabs on what I could and then right away after I hung up go write out my plot.

**LOU:** *What were the restrictions of the censorship at that time?*

# the story, and I would have to go scratching for the rest."

**DICK:** No mugging, really no violence like that.

**LOU:** *Couldn't show somebody getting bayonetted.*

**DICK:** No, or bullets going through their body.

**LOU:** *You could do damage to these big war machines and such like that, right?*

**DICK:** Well, you could show them getting shot or something but you couldn't show the *gory* part. There must have been some block on mugging, like they didn't want to convey that idea across to the little juveniles. *(Laughter.)* You know, they blamed us for all the juvenile delinquency, as they phrased it in those days. Now they blame it on dope or something.

**LOU:** *So, the writer I remember most on SGT. FURY after Stan is Gary Friedrich. You and John Severin turned in a whole batch of very memorable stories.*

**DICK:** I liked Gary as a writer, very good. At the end, though, it was rough, he would only turn in a half a synopsis. It was the same way, he'd hand in a synopsis then I would draw it then he would write the words to fit the pictures. Sometimes I would get a synopsis that only gave me part of the story and then I'd have to go scratching to find the rest of it. That would *upset* me because I'm very methodical, so if you could supply me the synopsis for 20 pages I could have the whole story done in one week.

**LOU:** *Was it pretty weird working with this wild young guy on a World War II comic?*

**DICK:** *(Laughter.)* I never got to see him really that often; I met him only a handful of times. He was very different. But his stories always were good. I liked his plots.

**LOU:** *And working with John Severin, what was that like?*

**SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS. Dick says changes were made on the song being sung here, from "As Time Goes By" to "Play It Again, Sam."**

I SURE AM GLAD YOU DECIDED TO COME IN AND WATER DOWN WITH US, CAPTAIN.
IF YOU HADN'T... WE'D NEVER HAVE KNOWN WHAT A MEAN SET OF MONKEYS YOU TICKLE!
YEAH, CAP'N... BUT I'M AFRAID I CAIN'T SAY AS MUCH FOR YOUR SINGIN'.
AWWW, HE DOESN'T SING SO BAD, DUM DUM... AND THAT SONG YOU JUST DID KNOCKED ME OUT!
WHAT DID YOU SAY THE NAME OF IT WAS?
GIN AND BITTERS 2¢
IT'S A THING I PICKED UP A FEW YEARS BACK... CALLED...
AS TIME GOES BY!!
WELL, I GOTTA ADMIT... IT MADE ME KINDA MISTY-EYED, TOO! SO WHY DON'T YA...

# "Severin was the type of inker that if I drew a

**DICK:** That was great, it was a good team. He was the type of inker that if I drew a tank he *added* to it. Whatever equipment was thrown in, medals on uniforms or whatever, he would *improve* upon it.

**LOU:** *The plug kind of got pulled on SGT. FURY, and of course CAPTAIN SAVAGE and COMBAT KELLY which you were also doing, in the early '70s. Was this due to the disenchantment in the late Vietnam era or what?*

**DICK:** No, I think it was just the assignment of whoever was inking it. John left and then I was frustrated because I was having all these different inkers; trying to get *control* of how it would come out. It never seemed to satisfy me when I saw what was published. Then Gary left and I would never know who the writer was — the teamwork just disappeared.

**LOU:** *COMBAT KELLY, that's one I remember; it was a weird book in that you started out with a DIRTY DOZEN concept and then in the last issue you killed off darn near everybody. How did that one come about?*

**DICK:** I don't remember, just that's the way they planned it.

**LOU:** *After FURY died in '73 you gravitated to DC where you cocreated SCALPHUNTER.*

**DICK:** Yes. **Joe Orlando** was the editor and . . . I forget who the writer was.

**LOU:** *Michael Fleisher.*

**DICK: Michael Fleisher** was the writer. Whether it was Michael's idea or an idea from **Sergio Aragones** I don't remember. **Joe Orlando** gave me the task of designing the costume, what he looked like.

**LOU:** *And that ended up being your "white Indian" kind of guy.*

**DICK:** Yeah. It was Michael writing it in the beginning, and while he was doing it we concentrated on the *Indian* factor. Then when **Gerry Conway** came along it became the white man end of it. **George Evans** was inking it while he was the Indian. I liked him.

**LOU:** *And you also got into JONAH*

VOLTRON
DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE
IT'S A VERY OLD MACHINE, PRINCE LOTOR — THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND!
WHERE DID YOU GET IT?
A PATROL FOUND IT ON THE TENTH MOON OF YATARAN AND BROUGHT IT TO ME.
EXCELLENT! TELL ME AGAIN HOW IT WORKS.
ILLUSTRATED BY DICK AYERS

**Panel from VOLTRON, story "Will Power". Coloring for this done by Dick's son Rich.**

# tank, he added to it. He would improve upon it."

*HEX around the late '70s, I think. What was it like working with Fleisher on that one?*

**DICK:** It was good. **Joe Orlando** told me when he assigned me that book, "Now, Dick, things have *changed* a little bit, it's not always the good guy wears the white hat and the bad guy wears the black hat."

**LOU:** *Clint Eastwood stuff.*

**DICK:** Yeah. They started to do away with the censorship thing and I could get a little bit more gory.

**LOU:** *You had people putting out people's eyes with pitchforks and all that kind of good stuff. Was it kind of weird working on something like that?*

**DICK:** At first, yeah.

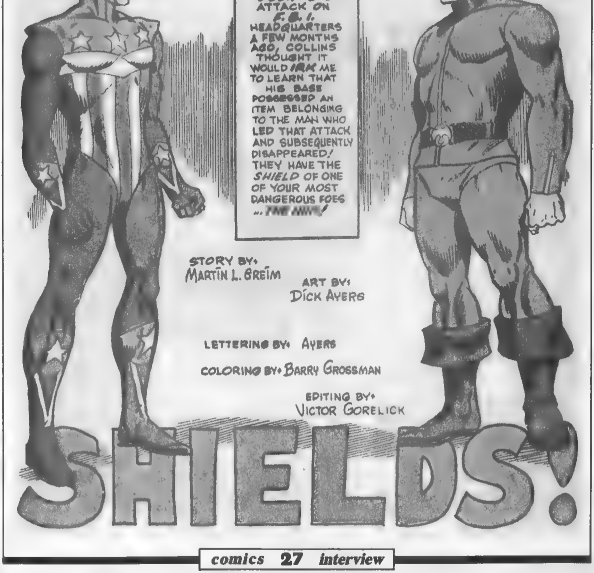
**LOU:** *Did you get used to it?*

**DICK:** Well . . . I forget who the editor was, but they wanted me to work on one of those black-and-white things with the horror, and I was rebelling, I didn't want to do it. So the publisher said, "Before you say no I want you to see a movie called THE WILD BUNCH and *then* come back and tell me you wouldn't do it." So I saw the movie, which was just out, with all that shooting and stuff, and then I said okay. After that session of doing those, with eyeballs flying through the air and stuff, doing JONAH HEX was tame. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *Somewhere in there you were out of comics and working as a night watchman and then Neal Adams came to your aid. Can you tell me something about that episode?*

**DICK:** Oh, yeah. Just about that time when I was working for General Foods in security there was an item in the paper one morning, THE DAILY NEWS, with a picture of **Neal Adams** in it, and **Joe**

**Splash from THE ORIGINAL SHIELD #4, October, 1984.**


"HAVING READ OF DELTA 3'S ATTACK ON F.B.I. HEADQUARTERS A FEW MONTHS AGO, COLLINS THOUGHT IT WOULD AMUSE ME TO LEARN THAT HIS BASE POSSESSED AN ITEM BELONGING TO THE MAN WHO LED THAT ATTACK AND SUBSEQUENTLY DISAPPEARED! THEY HAVE THE SHIELD OF ONE OF YOUR MOST DANGEROUS FOES ... THE MINK!"
STORY BY: MARTIN L. GREIM
ART BY: DICK AYERS
LETTERING BY: AYERS
COLORING BY: BARRY GROSSMAN
EDITING BY: VICTOR GORELICK
SHIELDS!

# "I guess I liked just about everything I ever did."

THIS LOOKS TUH BE THE FASTEST DEER HUNT IN DEER HUNTIN' HISTORY!
ALL AH GOT TUH DO'S SKIN AN' DRESS THIS SWEETHEART--
--AN' THEN AH--
UH-OH! AH HOPE AH DIDN'T REALLY JUST HEAR HIM SAY AH THOUGHT A- JUST HEARD
'CAUSE IF AH DID, THIS LITTLE HUNTIN' TRIP'A MINE'S SHORE 'NUFF GONNA TURN OUT TUH BE A WHOLE LOT MORE COMPLICATED THAN AH EVER INTENDED IT TUH BE!

**Dick Ayers and Tony DeZuniga collaborate their talents for JONAH HEX #50, July, 1981.**

**Shuster** and **Jerry Siegel**, Warner Communications had just awarded them — you know that story —

**LOU:** *Yeah, the pension for SUPERMAN.*

**DICK:** So then I called up Neal because I wanted to call up **Joe Shuster** — I didn't know where he was or anything — and congratulate him. So Neal asked me what I was doing and I told him, and he said, "Gee, that's not right. Come in and see me." So I went in and he saw me and he sent me up to see **Joe Orlando.**

**LOU:** *That's great. Any thoughts on your long career in comics, like what gave you the most pleasure, what was the least pleasurable, all that kind of good stuff?*

**DICK:** Oh, I liked just about everything I ever did.

**LOU:** *Who was the most fun editor to work with?*

**DICK:** Stan. I really got along very well with whoever I worked with.

**LOU:** *Which strip did you enjoy working on the most?*

**DICK:** GHOST RIDER.

**LOU:** *Frazetta did a lot of GHOST RIDER covers. Did you ever have a chance to speak with him?*

**DICK:** I met him once in **Ray Krank's** office, a very young fellow then. This was 1948 and he had two beautiful girls with him; he was on a date or something. *(Laughter.)* I liked his covers very much.

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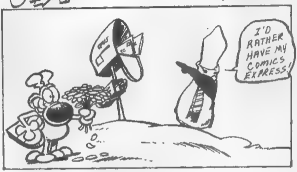
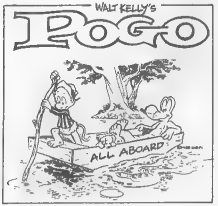


BIZARRO
By DAN PIRARO
GREG ACCIDENTALLY WOUNDED HIM OUT OF SEASON, SO WERE PUTTING HIM UP 'TILL HE GETS BACK ON HIS FEET TO AVOID LITIGATION...



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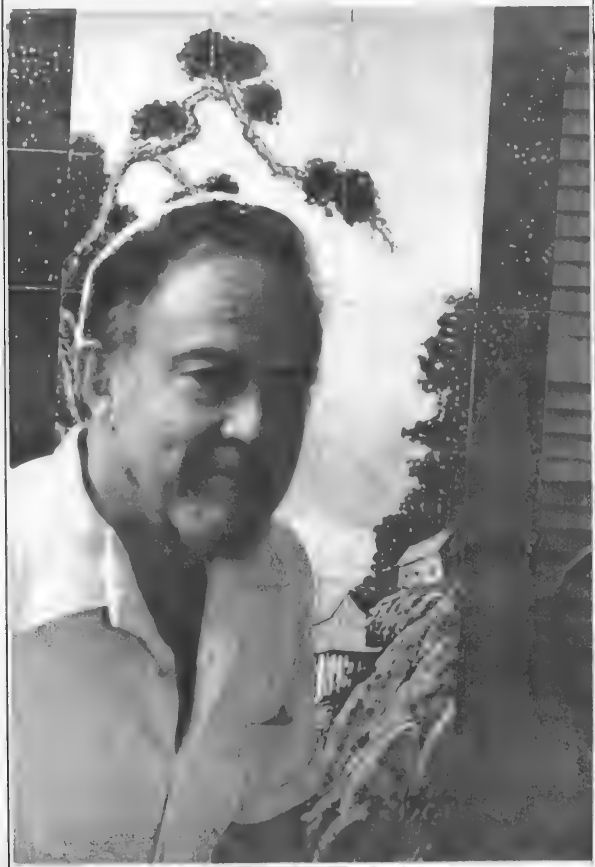

# "They're looking for kids like Miller and Sienkiewicz."

*Jim Mooney has been an integral part of the comics mainstream for almost forty years now, being the current illustrator of the SUPERBOY TV comic for DC. If you're a Silver Age fan you might remember him as the definitive Supergirl artist in ACTION COMICS. But, in his time, he's turned a worthy hand to a barrelful of strips at DC and Marvel: Superman and Batman (both separately and together in WORLD'S FINEST), the Legion of Super-Heroes, Spider-Man, Man-Thing, Ms. Marvel, the Son of Satan, and leave us not forget Marvel's late-'60s girlie-mag heroine — Pussycat! Even though Mooney has been an important figure in comics history, relatively little has been known about him. We decided to rememdy that. And we were glad we did, because Jim proved to be one of the nicest guys we ever interviewed. Let's go to the tape . . .*

**LOU MOUGIN:** *What are you doing now professionally, Jim?*

**JIM MOONEY:** Well, you knew I was working on SUPERBOY. I did about eight issues of it. Unfortunately, I had a cataract on one of my eyes so I had an implant, which worked out great except that I have to wear glasses to draw now. I can drive fine but that doesn't do a damn bit of good with drawing comics. *(Laughter.)* Anyway, I had to knock off for awhile, so I'm doing one every couple of issues, something like that. At the moment I'm working on a breakdown of **Anne Rice's** THE MUMMY for Millennium, an independent publisher, direct sales. Kind of a fun job, I'm enjoying it — a little change of pace.

I was supposed to do the **Anne Rice** VAMPIRE book. I was all prepped to do it, then SUPERBOY dropped in my lap. I got a call from **Mike Carlin,** "Would you be interested in doing SUPERBOY?" I didn't deliberate too long; I said yes. *(Laughter.)* You know, at this time it's a little bit *difficult* — I'm sure you're well aware — the field has changed so much and they're looking for kids like **Frank Miller** and **Bill Sienkiewicz** and the younger *enfants terrible* —

**LOU:** *Young turks we call them when we're being nice.*

**JIM:** The older guys, although they're still competent, are not necessarily that much in demand; so when work comes along you *grab* it! *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *You've got a long and varied history in comics, Jim. What assignment gave you the most pleasure, and what gave you the least?*

**JIM:** MAN-THING gave me the *most* pleasure. I enjoyed that *immensely.* The thing I disliked . . . there were *several* of them, actually. I certainly didn't enjoy that ROBIN in the STAR-SPANGLED book. But most of them were pretty much the same. They could be a bore or they could be a pleasure. Most of the time they became kind of boring. I had a long run on SUPERGIRL and there were times that I got bored with that.

**LOU:** *Of course, the watchword then was consistency rather than innovation, right?*

**JIM:** Yeah, very definitely

**LOU:** *Tell me something of your origin story, like how you got to become an artist, who inspired you and the like.*

**JIM:** Well, I was working in Hollywood trying to break into the movies — I wasn't successful *that* way, as an actor. My sister was under contract to MGM in those days.

**LOU:** *What was her name?*

**JIM: Julié Mooney.** She did walk-on and bit parts. In fact one thing that most of the sci-fi and fantasy fans remember is that she had a walk-on . . . I think it was **Merritt's** BURN, WITCH, BURN. Anyway, I never got anywhere with acting. I worked in nightclubs as a bar boy and checkroom attendant and so on and so on. So when the time came that I figured there might be something in the offing in New York with comics, I headed for New York.

**LOU:** *Which would be about 1940, right?*

**JIM:** Just about.

**LOU:** *Before that, one thing that interested me that I saw in Jerry Bails' WHO'S WHO is that you were an illustrator for WEIRD TALES for about five years, 1936 to 1941, is that right?*

**JIM:** Well, the dates aren't. It's a little *longer* range actually. I didn't do *much* illustration for them but I did do some, and that was when I was going to art school, the Los Angeles Art Institute. At that time it was Otis Art Institute. I just struck up an acquaintance with science-fiction writer **Hank Kuttner.** Hank and I became very good friends. He suggested that I submit something to **Farnsworth Wright,** I believe —

**LOU:** *Farnsworth Wright was the editor of WEIRD TALES at the time.*

**JIM:** Right. So that's how I got into that. Then through Hank I met **Julie Schwartz** and **Mort Weisinger.** They came out on a

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Jim Mooney
**Born:** 13 August 1919 — Mt. Vernon, NY
**Family:** I've got a wide range of children. My oldest boy is 48, his brother is 43, and my daughter is 17 — my second wife is a good bit younger than I am
**Art Influences:** At the very beginning it was Lou Fine. I worked in the Eisner shop and Lou Fine was there, and at that time I really didn't appreciate how vital Eisner's stuff was — I was only there two weeks *(Laughter,)* I just didn't like the bullpen type situation, couldn't concentrate with all those people around. I gravitated more towards Fine because it was mannered and it looked more elegant and very graceful. I realized in the long run that Will Eisner told a much better story, that he was much more of a comic-book artist. But Fine was extremely appealing when you're young and fresh out of art school, at least he was to me.
**Favorite Editor:** Stan Lee
**Favorite Movie:** CITIZEN KANE
**Favorite Color:** Probably blue

# JIM MOONEY

Supergirl, Superboy and Dial H for Hero ©1991 DC Comics, Inc. / Spider-Man, The Human Torch, The Lizard, Man-Thing and Ms. Marvel ©1991 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

# "A lot of the old comic-book characters are

visit to see Hank — so *consequently* when I went to New York I felt I'd have a little better chance of maybe getting work.

**LOU:** *Kuttner was writing GREEN LANTERN at the time, wasn't he?*

**JIM:** I don't know if he was doing any comic work or not. I *should* remember that but I don't recall. I know he was doing a lot for the pulps. You could be right, I don't really remember. At that time *most* of us didn't *boast* too much about doing comics. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *The first comics credit I have for you is at Ace where you drew characters like Lash Lightning, Magno, the Flag, Vulcan —*

**JIM:** Wait a second, that was my second. My first assignment was for a guy by the name of **Victor Fox.** I did a strip called THE MOTH, a one-shot. Being young and naive I fell for what he told me. He said, "We want something that looks like Batman and Robin." So I made it look like Batman and Robin and they were *sued! (Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *That was the second time they were sued; the first time was when they asked Eisner to do something called WONDER MAN that looked like Superman.*

**JIM:** Yeah, he was quite a character. He used to sit on an elevated desk. It was a long long pathway up to his desk in his private office, sort of Napoleonic. *(Laughter.)* He'd interview you and put you down as much as possible.

**LOU:** *And you got out of his clutches and ended up at Ace, and I've also got credits for you in the early '40s at Quality, Pines, Fiction House —*

**JIM:** I worked in the bullpen at Fiction House, worked with **Reuben Moreira** and **George Tuska** and quite a few others. **Nick Bescardi,** who later called himself **Nick Cardi.** I worked there during the war years. Most of the guys were going overseas and a few of us who were Limited Service or 4-F were still working in comics. I was Limited Service. I was married at the time and I had a kid, so they never got around to me.

**LOU:** *That's a good way to be Limited Service, by George.*

**JIM:** Better than 4-F but not much.

**LOU:** *Do you remember any of the things that you did there?*

**JIM:** Yeah, I did CAMILLA and SUICIDE SMITH, and just a variety of things.

**LOU:** *Everything they threw at you, I imagine.*

**JIM:** Right.

**LOU:** *And you did a character called WILDFIRE at Quality, right?*

**JIM:** Yeah. **Bob Turner,** who was a pulp writer, and I created that. Bob was working at Ace then and we became very close friends. When I was out in Hollywood, Bob came out there about the time I had my studio out there and he was writing for TV and various other things.

**LOU:** *That was when you . . . most of the younger people nowadays don't realize what a close relationship pulps and the comics had back then. They were put out virtually by the same publishers.*

**JIM:** A *lot* of comic-book characters were really derived from previous pulp characters.

**LOU:** *Yeah, the superheroes of the pulps as it were. By 1947 you were at DC where your most famous assignments came. Did you start out with BATMAN there?*

**JIM:** Actually what happened, I believe, **Dick Sprang** took off — he wanted to work in the west — and they needed somebody else to ghost it. I forget what happened, I'm a little vague on that, but there was **Mort Meskin, Jerry Robinson** and so on, and they just needed a guy at the time, and I latched onto it. I remember **Whitney Ellsworth** called me

**ACTION COMICS #309, February, 1964.**

SUPERGIRL
CITY! WE'RE ALL DOOMED TO DIE, KARA! QUICKLY, INTO THIS ROCKET...WE'RE SENDING YOU TO ...TO YOUR COUSIN, KAL-EL, ON EARTH...WHERE HE HAS BECOME THE MIGHTY SUPERMAN!
SOB! MOTHER! FATHER! HOW CAN I DESERT YOU NOW?! CHOKE! YOU CAN'T ASK ME TO DO THIS! I KNOW I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!

# really derived from previous pulp characters."

From HOUSE OF MYSTERY #156, January, 1966. Bobby begins his first adventure in "Dial H for Hero."
AND AFTER THE YOUNG GENIUS SPENDS HOURS IN HIS PRIVATE LAB...
HMM... I'VE GOT ENOUGH CLUES TO FIGURE OUT THESE SIGNS... THEY SEEM TO BE LETTERS OF AN ALPHABET-- BUT OF NO KNOWN LANGUAGE IN OUR CIVILIZATION! THIS GADGET MUST HAVE SOMEHOW COME FROM ANOTHER WORLD-- A MYSTERIOUS DIMENSION! NOW LET ME SEE...
ROBBY DIALS THE DECODED LETTERS, AND THEN...
"O"! SOCKAMAGEE! WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME...?
...IT SAYS...DIAL THE LETTERS, H-E-R-O... THAT SPELLS HERO! IS IT POSSIBLE...? I'M GONNA GIVE IT A TRY!
4

in and said, "What makes you think *you* can do this? I said I thought I could handle it, and he said, "Why are you so sure?" I said, "Well, don't you remember you *sued* because I did a strip that looked like Batman and Robin?" *(Laughter.)* That kind of tickled him.

**LOU:** *I remember a lot of your BATMAN and ROBIN stories from that time and one that stands out in my mind was the one about the crazy actor that went off and started killing people in line with the murders he was committing in his movies. Was that kind of a takeoff on Richard Widmark or what?*

**JIM:** I really, not having wrote it — and it's so *hard* to recall, there were so many — I get these questions sometimes and I *do* remember *some* of them more vividly — I do remember that to a certain extent but it doesn't stick out in my mind.

**LOU:** *Another one that stands out from the early '60s was where you did Robin as the Super Boy Wonder.*

**JIM:** That was kind of a *nothing* thing, you know. It was an assignment that was a real *bore!* *(Laughter.)* I don't know, I knocked it out because like anything else in those days you knocked it out for the money — *these* days you knock it out for the money. It was an assignment, somebody had to do it. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *You did a lot of things for DC around then, like BLACKHAWK and some of the mystery stuff. I guess I should ask you about TOMMY TOMORROW because you ended up doing such a long run of that in ACTION.*

**JIM:** I *loved* TOMMY TOMORROW. That was one of my favorites.

**LOU:** *Who created him?*

**JIM:** Good question. **Curt Swan** drew it before I did. He did a few of the early stories and then I got on it. I don't know whether that was **Binder** or not, it may have been. Either **Hamilton** or **Binder.**

**LOU:** *How about SPACE RANGER. You ended up doing that too.*

**JIM:** Yeah, that was a short run, but another kind of fun strip.

**LOU:** *That was one of Jack Schiff's?*

**JIM:** Yeah, I think Jack did edit that.

**LOU:** *Do you know who wrote it?*

**JIM:** I'm not sure. I just didn't pay too much attention.

**LOU:** *Okay. Your most famous assignment came in 1959 when you did the second SUPERGIRL story. How did you land that assignment, and was it your first time working for Mort?*

**JIM:** Yeah. Actually, before that I worked — you know, in the *early* days the editors all worked together, there was

**. . . and you thought *you've* had strange relationships.**

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# "I always liked Otto Binder's scripts the best."

sort of a team of **Jack Schiff, Murray Boltinoff, Mort Weisinger.** Later on it became more compartmentalized and **Weisinger** had his books, **Schiff** had his books, **Boltinoff** had his books. And of course **Whitney Ellsworth** was editor-in-chief then. He was the overseer of the whole thing.

But yeah, that was really the first assignment where I worked with Mort exclusively; and, you know, I don't know *why* they dumped that in my lap. I didn't expect it. I was working on several other assignments, primarily MYSTERY IN SPACE and some of that stuff, which I enjoyed, and I wasn't so sure that I *wanted* SUPERGIRL. But, the story of my life, I needed the money. *(Laughter.)* I needed the money so I took it. Anyway, that was a pretty long-lasting job.

**LOU:** *About ten years.*

**JIM:** A good long while.

**LOU:** *I really enjoyed SUPERGIRL. What was it like working on that strip? Any particular stories that you really remember?*

**JIM:** Well, I always liked **Binder's** scripts the best. **Jerry Siegel** wrote some; they were pretty good. **Ed Hamilton** wrote some. I had mixed reactions on that because, you know, with a long run —, and I've always been bored by any series, though MAN-THING was one of my *favorite* strips later on — but I had very mixed feelings about SUPERGIRL. About that time I had a studio on Hollywood Blvd., I was doing art service type things, and I was making so much damn more money with that stuff that I was tempted to give up comics.

There were periods of time there where I really kind of sloughed off, so SUPERGIRL was really kind of inconsistent. I put better drawing into it, more *thought* into it, in a later period when I moved back to New York and had more time to give it. When I had my studio there were just so many things coming into the place that I really couldn't give it as much attention as it really merited.

**LOU:** *Well, it always looked pretty good*

**John Buscema, innovator. Jim Mooney, adaptor. John Romita, consultant. All for SPIDER-MAN #77, October, 1969.**

I TOLD YOU THIS WAS A PRIVATE FIGHT, TORCH!
AND I MEANT IT!
ASBESTOS WEBBING?!!
HEY! WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON, ANYWAY?
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF TAKING SIDES!
I WANT HIM STOPPED AS MUCH AS YOU DO!
BUT I HAVE TO DO IT MY WAY!
WHAT'S THE BIT, MASKED MAN? NOBODY'S KEEPING SCORE!
I CAN'T TELL HIM THAT I PROMISED DR. CONNOR'S WIFE THAT NO HARM WOULD COME TO HIM.
IT MIGHT MAKE HIM SUSPECT THE LIZARD'S TRUE IDENTITY!
--TO SAY NOTHING OF MY OWN!

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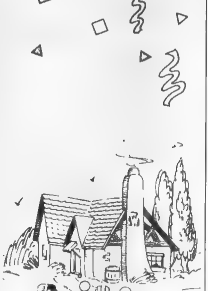

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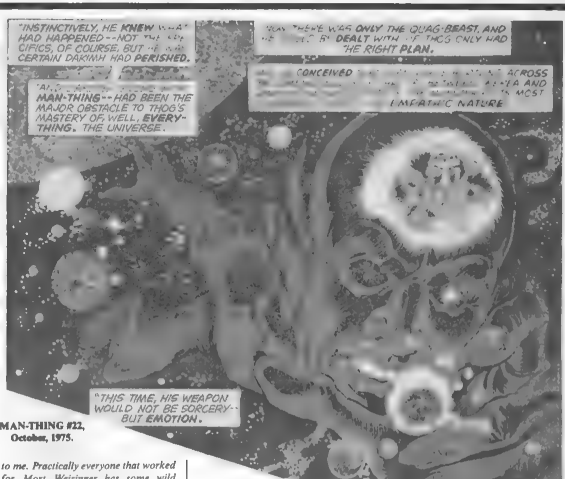
# "Mort was quite a guy. A very difficult guy in many ways."


"INSTINCTIVELY, HE KNEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED--NOT THE SPECIFICS, OF COURSE, BUT THAT CERTAIN DARKNH HAD PERISHED.
"THERE WAS ONLY THE QUAG-BEAST, AND HE ALONE DEALT WITH IT. THOG ONLY HAD THE RIGHT PLAN.
CONCEIVED
ACROSS
MOST
EMPATHETIC NATURE
"AT LAST, MAN-THING--HAD BEEN THE MAJOR OBSTACLE TO THOG'S MASTERY OF WELL, EVERYTHING. THE UNIVERSE.
"THIS TIME, HIS WEAPON WOULD NOT BE SORCERY--BUT EMOTION.

**MAN-THING #22, October, 1975.**

*to me. Practically everyone that worked for Mort Weisinger has some wild stories.*

**JIM:** Well, Mort *was* quite a guy to work for. He was a *talented* guy and very mercurial. He was a kind of a Jekyll and Hyde, too — the Jekyll side didn't come to the fore too often. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *I guess his Hyde was more impressive than his Jekyll.*

**JIM:** Mort kind of liked to be in charge, and if possible to get by with it he liked to put you down as much as possible.

**LOU:** *Keep you in your place.*

**JIM:** Yeah, definitely. One incident that happened after I'd moved back to New York, I was working for **Jack Schiff** too, and I'd come in and deliver SUPERGIRL and whatever I had for Jack, and Mort was on the phone. He waved me off, so I went into the other office where **Murray Boltinoff** and **George Kashdan** and **Jack Schiff** were. I was talking to Jack about the strip I was doing for him, I think it was DIAL H FOR HERO, and then Mort came *storming* in and said, "You were *supposed* to bring that SUPERGIRL to me, What the hell are you doing in here!" *(Laughter.)* I said, "Mort, you were busy, I was talking to Jack." He said, "You bring SUPERGIRL to me *first*, you don't pull this kind of stuff!" He was getting really hot under the collar, then I said, "Mort, I've had enough of this chicken shit. You can take SUPERGIRL and keep it." I started to say "shove it" but I didn't. *(Laughter.)* He almost dropped his cigar on the floor, walked back to his office.

Everybody was buzzing. Jack said, "Jesus Christ, this is going to be a problem. Jim, we can give you all the work you *want*." Murray said, "Yeah, we can give you all the work you want, don't *worry* about it." The whole bunch began to get a little bit worried because Mort was sort of the queen bee there and they didn't want to offend Mort because they all had to work together. I could see the handwriting on the wall. So, the next week when I came in Mort walked up to me and gave me my next SUPERGIRL script, so I thought better not to pursue it, better not to tell him to shove it. *(Laughter.)* I knew that they were a little bit uncomfortable about the situation, and I thought what the hell, if he didn't browbeat me too much more I'd stick with it for awhile longer. *(Laughter.)* He was really a very difficult guy in many ways.

**LOU:** *That's one of the more restrained comments I've heard about him, but I've also heard some good stuff about him. Well, you brought up DIAL H FOR HERO, which came out in 1966 in HOUSE OF MYSTERY, which was a really wild strip where Robby Reed dialed himself a hero about three times an issue. Did it kind of tax your imagination having to come up with those heroes, most of whom showed up one time and then vanished forever?*

**JIM:** Yeah. It wasn't a strip I particularly

# "Claremont would go to great length, telling me

enjoyed, and I think the quality of the work kind of reflected that. I guess when I really — all through my career whenever I haven't really enjoyed something too much it *showed*. I think it showed in that, the drawing was not too well thought out. It was a *dud*, I don't think it ever really took off. The stories were not great on it. I remember when **Jack Schiff** was thinking up the character and was trying to think of something for Robby Reed to say when he got excited —

**LOU:** *Sockamagee!*

**JIM:** God Almighty, Jack was like a little kid with that! "That's a great one isn't it — Sockamagee!" *(Laughter.)* I didn't want to offend him in any way, I thought it was okay, but it didn't send me like a passage from **Shakespeare.**

**LOU:** *It sounded like something out of 1,000 CLOWNS.*

**JIM:** Yeah. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *About 1968 you moved to Marvel. Was that due to the big shake-up in personnel DC had at that time?*

**JIM:** Primarily. There was one hell of a shake-up there at the time and I was beginning to see the handwriting on the wall. I'd known Stan since we were kids together — I shouldn't say kids, he was 19 and I was 21. But we'd been good friends all through the years, and Stan suggested that maybe I might like to come over there and work at Marvel. I really jumped at the chance because I knew that my days were numbered at DC — a lot of guys' were.

Anyway, I took over working with **John Romita,** over his layouts, and I *enjoyed* it. I learned an *awful* lot, I learned a *great* deal at Marvel. Stan was, you know . . . Stan would sometimes be a hard taskmaster, but he had tact and wit and he was graceful about it, unlike Mort who was just a sledge-hammer type. Anyway, Stan taught me a lot. I learned a lot from **John Romita** and **John Buscema,** and I think it polished up my style, made it far more finished and sophisticated.

**LOU:** *Well, it certainly did look good, the job you folks did on SPIDER-MAN for that three- or four-year period there.*

**JIM:** It was a learning experience for me, very valuable.

**LOU:** *Two of my favorites that you did at Marvel were with Steve Gerber, SON OF SATAN and MAN-THING. How did you end up on those, and what was it like working with Steve?*

**JIM:** Well, I *admired* Steve's stuff tremendously. I thought the guy was an extremely talented writer, way ahead of his time, a little bit like **Harlan Ellison.** Anyway, I enjoyed it immensely but we never had much contact with each other for some reason. We'd speak on the phone, and Steve was a very articulate guy, but he never had much to say. I knew he liked my stuff, he indicated that, and I let him know that I enjoyed working with him. I think that was one of the most interesting and stimulating strips that I've ever done, and we worked on OMEGA later.

**LOU:** *Yeah, you did; I'd forgot all about that.*

**JIM:** I enjoyed that *type* of strip *more,* SON OF SATAN and MAN-THING and GHOST RIDER, more than SPIDER-MAN or SUPERMAN or SUPERGIRL, which after awhile is the same old character doing pretty much the same old thing, gets to be a hell of a bore. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *Did you ever have any qualms about some of the stuff you had to draw in SON OF SATAN, or did you guys ever get any complaints from church groups or the like about it?*

**JIM:** No flak at all, and it didn't bother *me.* Some of the stuff they're putting out today *does* bother me. I just don't care for the splatter school, sadism — I defend their right to do it, but I also defend my right not to read it! *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *Did some of the double-page splashes in MAN-THING, where you had to draw 50 zillion characters, ever tax you?*

**JIM:** Oh, yeah, it took time. But, you know, it was one of those things — in spite of having to make a buck at it — I put a lot more time than I could afford into it because I *enjoyed* it.

**LOU:** *Well, you're also a tay designer. Can you tell me anything about that?*

**JIM:** Actually, that's kind of a misnomer. I was working for a guy who marketed toys and he was milking me for ideas. I'd come up with stuff and he'd pay a certain amount and, "Well, if we develop them we'll *both* get rich!" Well, I think he got rich but I never did.

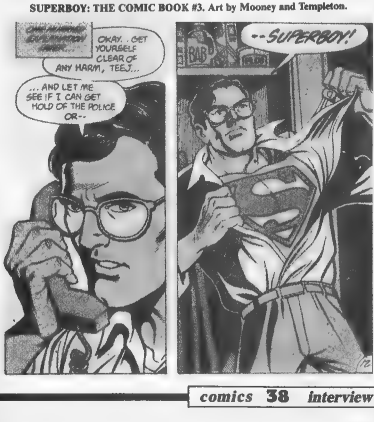
**LOU:** *You have to get it in writing that you'll get rich too.*

**JIM:** I came up with a few things that later on became pretty famous under another name. I can't think of the name now, but that doll you could dress or undress was pretty darn close to one of the ideas I'd given him. I didn't work there long because it was not amounting to anything. I was getting the short end of the stick.

**LOU:** *What animation work were you involved with?*

**JIM:** Well, when I had my studio on Hollywood Blvd., I did what you would call *limited* animation. That was primarily for local advertisers, car dealers

**SUPERBOY: THE COMIC BOOK #3. Art by Mooney and Templeton.**



# subtle nuances of how the thing should be done."

**Panel from MS. MARVEL #5, May, 1977. Art by Mooney and Simnott.**

and so on. What I actually did was *extremely* limited. The photographer I worked with did most of the actual deal. I'd do a background and some of the cels and with his photography and repetition and so on we'd have sort of a *crude* limited animation commercial. I did quite a few of those, but it wasn't full animation; it certainly wasn't anything that would rival Disney. *(Laughter.)* That was a one-man operation except for my cameraman.

**LOU:** *After MAN-THING you ended up doing OMEGA with Steve. Was that something to take up the slack after losing MAN-THING or what?*

**JIM:** Well, obviously they were trying to feed me work because I was under contract That's the reason I moved to Florida. *(Laughter.)* I wanted to have some sort of income coming in on a regular basis so I finagled a contract, and that lasted for ten years, so they were feeding me whatever would come along. OMEGA was one of the *better* things that came along, and then later on I did MS. MARVEL —

**LOU:** *Any echoes of SUPERGIRL in that one?*

**JIM:** No, it was quite a bit different from SUPERGIRL, more action and far *looser*, I think. It was a pleasant enough strip. But after that I gravitated primarily back to finalizing and inking, which I was doing at first with **John Romita.** This was for one very very good reason: I found that I was a far faster inker than I was a penciller. I have *always* been a very very slow penciller and a relatively fast inker, so it was mainly to maintain my contract obligations that I turned to inking, and I inked a *tremendous* amount of stuff for them at that time.

**LOU:** *What was it like working with Chris Claremont on MS. MARVEL?*

**JIM:** It was kind of funny. He used to call and give me the plot on the phone and he would talk and talk and talk and *talk!* It was not that I felt it unpleasant, you know, but I used to get *nervous!* I used to think, "My God, does he *need* to take this long?" And then it occurred to me that Marvel was paying for it. *(Laughter.)* He called me, I didn't call him, because I didn't have the guts to charge Marvel.

**LOU:** *And he would just talk it out on the phone like that?*

**JIM:** No, he would give me some written material, but primarily it would be, "Look, this is the way psychologically we want to handle this, going into the subtle nuances of it, which were important and it took a lot of time to get them across. I thought he was a hell of a writer, and he's certainly proved it with his track record. He would go into great length giving me information about just the subtle nuances of how the thing should be done.

**LOU:** *In between MS. MARVEL and SUPERBOY what was there?*

**JIM:** Inking and finalizing. I worked over **Sal Buscema's** stuff on THE DEFENDERS, I did the inking on the first SPIDER-WOMAN, and . . . so much stuff came to me at that time, you know, I've kind of lost track. Later on, toward the end of my contract, before I retired, I was doing almost all of the SPIDER-MAN stuff, and there was a variety of guys doing SPIDER-MAN. Also, at that time I pencilled and inked a SPIDEY SUPER-STORIES, worked directly for Sesame Street on that. And one thing I'd like to mention that I did, you may be familiar with or may not but I had a lot of *fun* with it, and that was a strip called PUSSYCAT. It was in STAG, it wasn't in a comic book, but it was a real *fun* thing.

**LOU:** *It was a strip about a female secret agent type, right?*

**JIM:** Yeah.

**LOU:** *Who had a habit of losing her clothes.*

**JIM:** Almost every panel. *(Laughter.)*

**LOU:** *I remember seeing your pinup of her in an issue of AMAZING HEROES.*

**JIM:** Yeah, I did do a pinup for them.

**LOU:** *Did Wally Wood ink you on those, or am I wrong?*

**JIM:** *My* first job on that was to finish **Wally Wood's** layouts, that's how I got into it. Of course, **Bill Ward** did some of them too. Then it came to me until it finally died. *(Laughter.)*

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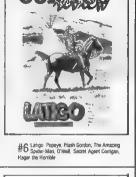


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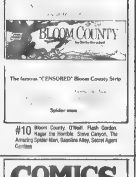


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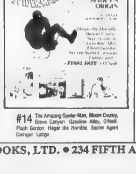


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#20 Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Lotigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley COVER: TOM FEISTER

#21 Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

#22 Popeye, Flash Gordon, Lotigo, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Gasoline Alley COVER: BRANT LEWIS

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#25 Secret Agent Corrigan, Popeye, Lotigo, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley COVER: GEORGE CRAIG

#26 Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Lotigo, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#27 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

#28 Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley COVER: RICH MILLER

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#33 Peppers, Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley. COVER: BARRY LEIBOW

#34 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Lions/Calvin, Peppers, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, The Wallet, Family Ties

#35 Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Longo, Peppers, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

#36 Bloom County, The Phantom, Beetle Bailey, Peppers, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon

#37 Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Longo, Blondie, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#38 Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon. COVER: WALT SAUNDERS

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#44 Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley, Calvin and Hobbes, Hagar the Horrible, Longo, The Phantom, Outland, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Batman. COVER: TED DOSTERMANN

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#46 Hagar the Horrible, Bloom County, Longo, The Phantom, Lizzie and Hollow, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley. COVER BY TOM YEATES

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#53 New Batman and Mockesty Binkss stories begin! Plus Flash Gordon, The Phantom, Lurigo and Amazing Spider-Man

#54 Fantastic Flash Gordon story! New Lurigo and Phantom stories begin! Plus Batman, Amazing Spider-Man and Mockesty Binkss

#55 New Amazing Spider-Man and Flash Gordon stories begin! Plus Batman, The Phantom, Lurigo, Mockesty Binkss and Batman

#56 New Batman and Phantom stories begin! Plus Gasoline Alley, Mockesty Binkss, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Spider-Man and Lurigo

#57 New Mockesty Binkss and Flash Gordon stories begin! Plus Bloom County, The Phantom, Lurigo, Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley and Batman COVER ROMERO

#58 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles begin! Also new stories start in Gasoline Alley and The Phantom. Plus Spider-Man, Mockesty Binkss, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Lurigo and Batman

#59 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Batman, Bloom County, The Phantom, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Mockesty Binkss and Lurigo COVER THEM BLANK!

#60 New Batman, Flash Gordon and Lurigo stories begin! Plus Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Bloom County, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Spider-Man and Mockesty Binkss

#61 Bloom County ends! New Mockesty Binkss, Phantom and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles stories start! Plus Gasoline Alley, Lurigo, Batman, Flash Gordon and Spider-Man

#62 Lurigo ends! Plus Mockesty Binkss, The Phantom, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Gasoline Alley, Lurigo, Batman, Flash Gordon

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# "'Kamikaze' was one of my favorite stories. It was

Here: Pencils from the 2-D ROCKETEER adaptation from Disney. On the next page, the finished product, all by Mr. Dixon, from pencil to pen to brush.

THE ROCKETEER © 1991 Disney Studios / AIR HAWK AND THE FLYING DOCTORS © 1991 Sun News Pictorial / STRATEGIC POLICY and DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS / THE FLYING DOCTORS © 1991 Sun News Pictorial / STRATEGIC POLICY and DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (magazine) © 1991 Same

**the pilot that chickened out and flew to Australia."**

# JOHN DIXON

*In part 1, last issue, John talked about early days and influences, the beginning of AIR HAWK, and the Australian comics scene in general. But he had more to say than we could cram into one issue. Herewith begins part 2 . . .*

**PAUL POWER:** *Now, all in all you drew AIR HAWK — and AIR HAWK covered from time to time some pretty wild stories, dealt with spies and —*

**JOHN DIXON:** Oh, everything, yeah — the sort of stuff I'm sure never really happens out in those parts.

**PAUL:** *You dealt with a Japanese Zero pilot out in the bush —*

**JOHN:** That was one of my *favorite* stories. He was the kamikaze pilot that chickened out and flew to Australia, landed out in the Outback, had been living there in the caves. He had vegetable gardens and all this sort of stuff, and the Zero was still there parked in this cave. That was one of my favorite stories. It was called "Kamikaze."

**PAUL:** *Then you had some pretty fantastic ones. Remember, I suggested the yowie story to you. I remember bringing the magazine to you. They were trying to say bigfoot in Australia, the yowie.*

**JOHN:** You know that the fellow that lives up in Katoomba that is the president of the Yowie Society, I forget his name now, he had had a couple of articles published about so-called yowie sightings and thought I based the yowie on his descriptions. This journalist from one of the southern coast newspapers phoned me up and asked me had I ever seen a yowie, I said no, and then he asked me a lot of questions about the yowie. I said, "Look, I don't believe the yowie exists. I think it's a lot of bullshit." *(Laughter.)* He appeared to be a little bit taken aback, and I found out later that he was the brother of the guy from Katoomba.

**PAUL:** *Really? What, he just passed himself off as somebody else?*

**JOHN:** No, he was the brother and because of his brother he was interested in the subject, and he thought it would make a good article for his paper. Everything was fine But anyway, the article was published, but when I said it was a lot of bullshit I didn't realize I was

# "Working for years on a strip, the people become

SO THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO IT!
YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT IT THEN?
WHEN I WAS WITH AIR INTELLIGENCE DURING THE WAR, WE INVESTIGATED REPORTS THAT A GERMAN BOMBER HAD CROSSED THE COAST NEAR DARWIN!

talking to the guy's brother. I still think it's a lot of bullshit.

**PAUL:** *I think it's a lot of bullshit, too, but it was kind of an interesting story. What you did was very offbeat, that woman appeasing him by feeding him — that was a wild story.*

**JOHN:** First time I showed a pair of naked boobs was one of the yowie women. *(Laughter.)*

**PAUL:** *I think in part you were inspired in your drawing technique, in the mid '60s, by Jim Holdaway.*

**JOHN:** It wasn't conscious, I wasn't consciously doing it. I remember Modesty Blaise was a very sexy-looking woman when **Holdaway** did it, and those things creep in your work. I think that I was influenced by **Caniff**, I was influenced by **Raymond**, and I also enjoyed . . . the fellow that did JOHNNY HAZARD, **Frank Robbins.** I think his style was magnificent, and yet I understand that that strip ended up cancelled along with all the other adventure strips.

**PAUL:** *You carried on with AIR HAWK a good five years after most adventure strips just folded up.*

**JOHN:** I know. They used to be the big thing, everyone used to love reading the adventure strips. I don't know why they demised. I thought maybe it was because of television, but then television *also* caters to comedy and it didn't kill the gag strips.

**PAUL:** *You know what I think it is? In a gag strip you can tell a story, introduction and midpoint and then punch line, three panels. In an adventure strip you really need four panels to move it along. When you've only got three, in some cases two, you can't push a story along. Another thing you did in AIR HAWK, most American strips would run six to eight weeks an adventure and sometimes you would run three months.*

**JOHN:** The daily story would average out at about 20 weeks. But I could not . . . the stories that I'd write were of a length that, I think, *could* have been adapted into an hour TV series — and maybe I had that in mind. I think I had that in mind.

**PAUL:** *Well, AIR HAWK did get picked up for television. Tell us about that, what you can.*

**JOHN:** Well, unfortunately the fellow that owned that company, he died of a heart attack just after all this. He just made the pilot. The guy that had the part of Jim Hawk *looked* the part — damn, what was his name? Not **Frank Ifield — PAUL:** *The singer?*

**JOHN:** No, **Frank Ifield** was the singer. This guy's name was something **Ifield** I think. He really looked the part. The thing went ahead, in fact the contract called for I was supposed to be consulted, I was supposed to be involved in the storyline, the whole bit. Anyway, it went ahead and I didn't even *know* they were going ahead, I didn't even *know* they'd started shooting.

**PAUL:** *That's too bad.*

**JOHN:** Yeah.

**PAUL:** *We talked about this when I was working for you: I always felt it would make a good TV series, or a movie, because it was so cinematic. Now, AIR HAWK also dealt with a little science fiction. The flying saucer bank robbers was pretty funny.*

**JOHN:** Yeah, yeah.

**PAUL:** *And you had the adventure about the prehistoric kangaroo.*

**JOHN:** "Killer Roo" was the name of the story.

**PAUL:** *With the B-52 that was left in the Outback there —*

**JOHN:** Wait a minute, that was a German bomber because . . . It was a German bomber, I can't remember why . . . I remember it had a black cross on it.

**PAUL:** *Anyway, what were some of the others? You did one about a guy that was some sort of werewolf character or something.*

**JOHN:** This was a long time ago and sometimes if you can tell me the name of a story everything *exact* will come back. But that's right, there was a guy that dressed up as a bunyip, the legendary monster. He was a recluse and he used to do this just to scare people away. I cannot remember — that was one of the very early Sunday stories —

**PAUL:** *I think "Killer Roo" was '84.*

**JOHN:** That was a Sunday, an early Sunday one.

**PAUL:** *How did you do that? I mean, the level of work that you did, you drew consistently well from 1946 through to . . . what, '78 was the last strip on AIR HAWK?*

**JOHN:** Well, I worked right up to the time I left to come over here. I've been here five years — so the last work on AIR HAWK was no more than five or six years ago.

**PAUL:** *How did you feel when you finally gave it up?*

**JOHN:** Saw. It's like . . . this sounds silly, but for anybody working on something for a lot of years, a strip like this, the people become very real to you in your mind. They all have their own person-

**very real to you. They have their own personalities."**

THAT WAS ABOUT A MONTH BEFORE GERMANY SURRENDERED! A PRETTY THOROUGH SEARCH WAS MADE!
BUT NO TRACE OF IT WAS EVER FOUND! 'TILL NOW, THAT IS!
THEN YOU THINK THIS IS THE SAME BOMBER?

alities, you know. This sounds really wild, it sounds a bit silly, but these people became sort of like friends. Then suddenly you stop production and it's like losing friends. It's your whole life because you're working on it — all the years I spent working on it —

**PAUL:** *Well, you worked from 1958 to — gee, thirty years.*

**JOHN:** Well, there was 28 years on AIR HAWK, ten years before that on comic books, so that makes about 40 years — and I was tired to say the least. I was real tired.

**PAUL:** *And you had a real hankering to do oil paintings, right?*

**JOHN:** Yeah, I would have liked to have done it, but there's no money in it. See, my mother was a painter —

**PAUL:** *Well, that's funny your dad wouldn't want you to be an artist.*

**JOHN:** That's right. He was a real *practical* sort of person and artwork is not a practical thing, you know. It's just something that people play at. So he wanted me to be an engineer. But to be an engineer you have to have very good mathematics, and maths was my worst subject at school.

**PAUL:** *Mine too.*

**JOHN:** That applies to a lot of creative people. The side of the brain that's got maths, numbers, is on one side of your head, the side of the brain that's got creativity is on the other side, and very rarely do you have both of them highly developed. And in those days the policy was that you were not permitted to use your left hand at school, you were forced to use your right hand. Now this, they found out, really screws people up.

**PAUL:** *Sure.*

WE'LL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE— THEY COULD HAVE SURVIVED! I DOUBT IT THOUGH!
JIM! LOOK THROUGH THERE, ISN'T THAT SOME SORT OF DWELLING?

**An early example of John's ability to add drama to a static situation by means of panel variations and placement of his blacks, circa 1961.**

# "The teacher I had in First Class, if she saw you using your

**JOHN:** The teacher I had in first class if she saw you using your left hand she'd *bang* you over the knuckles with this big long ruler, so I learned to write with my right hand. But I still drew with my left, so I became ambidextrous — so now I use both hands for most things.

**PAUL:** *Can you draw with both hands?*
**JOHN:** No, I draw with my left. I write with my right. I use tools with both. It's handy. What do you use?
**PAUL:** *Right-handed, I was always right-handed. My old man was left-handed.*
**JOHN:** Now that they've stopped knocking it out of people at school, you would be amazed at the number of left-handed people that you see.
**PAUL:** *That's such a ridiculous thing to try and conform people to.*
**JOHN:** Well, way back in the dark days left-handed people were considered to be

AIR HAWK and the FLYING DOCTORS
by JOHN DIXON
FREAK SURVIVOR FROM A PAST AGE, THE GIANT 'ROO BECOMES MADDENED BY THE PROLONGED MACHINE-GUN FIRE - RAZOR SHARP TOES SLASH THE TORMENTOR
THEN A TREMENDOUS LUNGE SNAPS THE RESTRAINING LINKS - TRANSFIXED WITH FEAR, THE NATIVES CROUCH, WAITING FOR THE NEXT SAVAGE ATTACK.
BUT NONE COMES - THE 'ROO'S EARS PRICK AS IF DETECTING SOME DISTANT CALL.
GUNTHER WONT BE BOTHERING HUMANITY EVER AGAIN - BUT WE'D BETTER MAKE OURSELVES SCARCE BEFORE THOSE NATIVES RECOVER!
NO DICE, JIM! THOSE FELLOWS AREN'T UP THERE FOR THE VIEW!
SO GUNTHER DID SEND A WAR-PARTY AROUND TO CUT US OFF!

**AIR HAWK AND THE FLYING DOCTORS, as seen in the Sun-Herald in April of 1962. This Sunday is mentioned extensively in this interview.**

# left hand, she banged you over the knuckles with a ruler."

possessed.

**PAUL:** *Really?*

**JOHN:** That's right.

**PAUL:** *You were possessed by a comic strip, that's what you were possessed by.*

**JOHN:** Yeah.

**PAUL:** *Now, with AIR HAWK itself did you have a hard time coming up with stories? Did you used to consult with other people?*

**JOHN:** At the beginning my mind was just full of ideas, but over a period of all those years you use them. You see, all your stories are confined to the Australian Outback. You can't roam the world, so the longer it went the *harder* the stories became. At the end I was finding that I was having to do sequels on other stories, which was quite good, it worked fine.

**PAUL:** *Now, I remember when Mike*

THE 'BUTCHER OF BORCHAVEN' LIES STILL IN A CRUMPLED HEAP-DESTROYED AS SURELY AS THE KANGAROOS THIN VENEER OF DOMESTICATION.

SUDDENLY, WITH GIGANTIC BOUNDS, IT SPEEDS AWAY, AND VANISHES INTO THE FAR REACHES OF THE VALLEY-NEVER AGAIN TO BE SEEN BY MAN.

NEARING THE BOTTOM, HE ADDRESSES THE SULLEN NATIVES IN THEIR OWN DIALECT. HIS WORDS QUICKLY DRAW SHOUTS OF ANGER.
4-15
CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE

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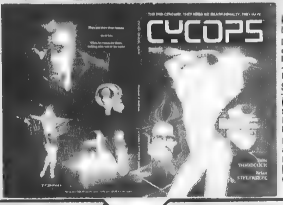


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# "An idea will pop into your head — but it's not original."

AIR HAWK and the FLYING DOCTORS
LEADING THAT COL. CLYDE OUT OF STEGER'S TRAIL, CURTIS AGENT CARPENTER RETURNS TO ALICE SPRINGS IN A BID TO INTERCEPT THE MAN HE CALLS "ASSASSIN"
COOPERATION FROM THE LOCAL POLICE WILL GIVE HIM OUR CHANCES
TRACING THE COLONEL IN A PLACE THIS SIZE SHOULD BE EASY, GORDON!
ONE THING IN OUR FAVOUR — IT'S SOUBTFUL STEGER KNOWS WE'RE ONTO HIM
SO IT'S ON THE CARPE 'EE — WILL COMB EACH HERE TO QUESTION YOU PERSONALLY
LET'S HOPE SO!
WHILE CARPENTER MOBILISES A POLICE SEARCH IN ALICE SPRINGS, STEGER WAITS IMPATIENTLY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BALLARDRY.
ANOTHER TWO HOURS BEFORE DARKNESS SHOULD BE KELLEP — THIRTY MINUTES AFTER THAT —
... AND GREGSON PETCO ALIAS PAUL STREGER WILL BE DEAD ... THE "PETCO FILE" WILL BE CLOSED
WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS, MR. STEGER? YOU CAN'T REMAIN IN HIDING INDEFINITELY
IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME, MR. VAUGHN
BEFORE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ARE BROKEN OFF BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES
I SUSPECTED AS MUCH
THE BORODVIAN EMBASSY STAFF WILL BE EXPELLED! — ONLY THEN WILL I BE FREE TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE HERE.
MOM, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE HAD AN EXHAUSTING DAY!
GOOD NIGHT, MR. STEGER! ... AND YOU CAN SLEEP EASY!
WHILE AT ALICE SPRINGS,
1-7
A FOREIGN-LOOKING FITTERS YOUR DESCRIPTION HIRED A LANDROVER AND HUNTING RIFLE THIS AROO — HE HEADED NORTH
OH NO!
CONTINUED NEXT WEEK...

**Here's an example of Mike Taberett as illustrator, circa 1968.**

*Tabrett, your first assistant on the Sunday, when he left your employ and then Hart Amos came in — this is like '69 or '70 — Mike Tabrett worked at THE SUN HERALD and he was developing a strip at the time about a little Outback kid. It just happened to be a coincidence, but you drew a strip and the kid looked just the same. I couldn't believe it. Mike showed me his strip and I said, "You better call Dixon, he's drawing the same character that you've got." He was pretty shocked by that.*

**JOHN:** I don't remember the strip that you're referring to, but you see his style was so much like mine anyway —

**PAUL:** *This story had to do with this kid who had an abusive father, and there were poachers of Australian wildlife, and —*

**JOHN:** My story?

**PAUL:** *Your story. And it happened in his story the kid had an abusive father, too. He drc ? the same as you and the character looked the same, it was just amazing. I was wondering if you guys might have talked about something like this earlier on and it just came back, or synchronicity of ideas?*

**JOHN:** That can happen. Sometimes an idea will pop into your head which you *think* is an original idea but it's not necessarily an original idea. It can come out of your subconscious and it can be something that happened years ago or something you saw years ago — and sometimes there are cases of plagiarism where it's not *deliberate* plagiarism, just totally subconscious. Things can pop up out of the subconscious. I don't ever recall ever doing it myself, but I know that it's happened to people.

**PAUL:** *That was a case . . . I mean, he didn't push it any further anyway because he did about five strips and said, "Man, it's a lot of hard work." It makes you a better artist though, I believe.*

**JOHN:** Oh, yeah. But he was very busy, you know. He was working seven days a week. When he first went to THE SUN HERALD he was still doing the Sunday strip for me, he was working part-time on that, he was working hard on it. It became too much for him.

**PAUL:** *Now, Hart Amos was doing DEVIL DOONE since like 1946, then he stopped doing it and you started bugging him about taking over the strip, you remember?*

**JOHN:** Well, he told me that he had been doing DEVIL DOONE for 30 years, and he said, "After 30 years I have had comic strips, and I do not want to *touch* another comic strip — I don't want to touch another *brush!*" I liked his style, his style was not unsimilar to mine, and anyway we got talking and he said, "Tell you what, I'll just do one story and see how it goes." That was fine.

**PAUL:** *And that was reproduced pretty dark. It was a story about a submarine or something.*

**JOHN:** Yeah, I remember that.

**PAUL:** *It was a radical difference in style from what Mike had been doing for you.*

**JOHN:** Sure, yeah.

**PAUL:** *And I knew it was Hart Amos even though he didn't sign the strip.*

**JOHN:** Anyway, he did the one story and then decided he was enjoying himself. He had the whole week to do the Sunday one and the pressures weren't as great as when he was doing not only DEVIL DOONE but other illustrations.

**PAUL:** *He was doing advertising, he was doing stuff for WOMEN'S DAY every now and then, and THE HOME*

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# THE FIRST TIME

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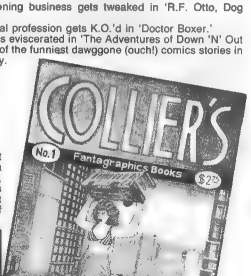


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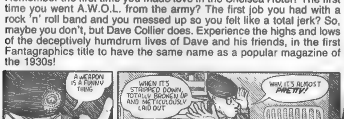


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# "At one time, my mind was exploding with fresh ideas."

*JOURNAL — he was doing a lot of work. And DEVIL DOONE had about nine to twelve panels a page!*

**JOHN:** I know! That's a lot of work.

**PAUL:** *And it was just chock a block of detail!*

**JOHN:** After he quit AIR HAWK he threw his brushes away, dismantled his drawing board, and *quit*. And he's very happy! Then he started painting.

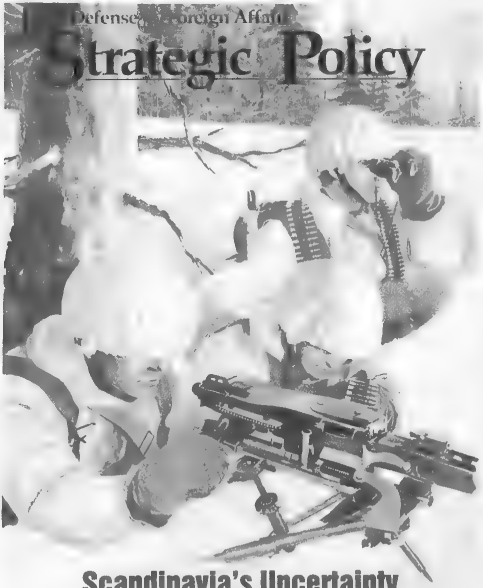
**PAUL:** *He seemed a little sad when it finally really dawned on him that he wasn't doing the strip anymore. He was happy to be painting, but he kind of missed it you know.*

**JOHN:** Well, it's a lot of fun, but he had started to burn out. That is something that happens to us fellows after a long period of time. He said that he was experiencing burnout the time he quit DEVIL DOONE, then by the time he finished doing AIR HAWK he had reached burnout stage again. He found himself working all night and he got completely out of whack with time. He was spending seven days to get the Sunday strip done.

**PAUL:** *Well, look at the work he put in there!*

**JOHN:** But he was just burning out again. I burned out too. By the time I quit the strip I'd reached burnout stage. I found that my creative processes sort of stopped working. At one time my mind was just *exploding* with fresh ideas, new ideas, good ideas, and by the time I stopped everything seemed to have ground to a stop. It's a frightening feeling! All your life you thought that you could go on forever.

**PAUL:** *Did you find that you were tired of the characters?*




**Another fine example of Mr. Dixon's beautifully-done covers.**

# "With a newspaper strip, it's a continual thing. With

**JOHN:** No, I was just tired of the constant treadmill, you know. The constant repetitious work that I was doing.
**PAUL:** *Although, I might add, when you drew your characters you always tried to vary your compositions. You didn't fall back on formula; there was no real formula to the drawing.*
**JOHN:** Well, there probably was but it wasn't obvious.
**PAUL:** *Okay. (Laughter.)*
**JOHN:** You tend to have certain hand positions that you use because they're good hand positions. That's the hand position you know you can draw best. Like the gesture, the point —
**PAUL:** *John's giving me the bird here.* (Laughter.) *So, you got offered this job out here in Washington. How'd that come about?*
**JOHN:** Well, the fellow that owns the business, it's a defense publication, was over in Sydney and he was going to start up a shipping magazine out of London and he asked me would I come over and be art director and illustrator for this new shipping magazine, a yachting magazine in fact. That's where I was supposed to go to begin with, but the London office wasn't set up yet so he wanted me to come to Washington and get some experience. And that's what I did.

After I worked in Washington for about twelve months he sent me out to London. I set up an art studio there, got all set, and then he wasn't ready then to start his yachting magazine, said he needed me back in Washington. It was fortunate because I do not like London; I found London abysmal. It was terrible, the weather was bad, it was expensive, and I was extremely lonely. I was happier, actually, back in Washington, even though I was still fairly lonely.

The only people I knew here were the staff, because I used to live in the office, a little flat attached to the office. I found myself caught up in the same seven-day-a-week routine, because there was *always* work to be done so I just kept working. It wasn't until I met Sue that my life started changing, and it changed quite dramatically. I moved out of the office and life was really great then.
**PAUL:** *I was kind of shocked when I heard you were in Washington D.C. For you it was kind of funny. Working for you, I came in full of piss and vinegar, and you said, "Why would you want to do this for a living?" I was —*
**JOHN:** Well, I never really discouraged anybody but I liked to open people's eyes to the fact that this was a business, it was hard work. There's a lot of young fellows — and you *know* these people — that think it's just going to be a lot of fun and games, they don't take it seriously. But you were serious. You applied your talent and you had a lot of drive — I think you had more drive than anybody I ever met.
**PAUL:** *Wow, thanks.*
**JOHN:** Really. That's why you're where you are today.
**PAUL:** *I just loved it. I was totally fascinated with the whole Australian contingent of comic books. They were solid artists, man, and they weren't drawing American comics. They may have been inspired by them, but everyone had their own style. Stanley Pitt mimicked Alex Raymond but did it so well no one could — I mean, if you're going to swipe from anybody you may as well —*
**JOHN:** Swipe the best!
**PAUL:** *Yeah. All these guys came from various areas and they all were solid draftsmen in comics, and that's what I liked about Australian comics. Australian comics were real solid and a lot of fun and represented the country.*
**JOHN:** A lot of talent.
**PAUL:** *And eventually through John Ryan everyone got to meet each other in the '70s.*
**JOHN:** Yeah, that's true, John was the one that was responsible for getting everyone together.
**PAUL:** *And he wrote that book about Australian —*
**JOHN:** PANEL BY PANEL. You know that he died from a heart attack just after that book —
**PAUL:** *Yeah, two weeks after.*
**JOHN:** That was terrible.
**PAUL:** *But on the other hand the book was something that he always wanted to do and he finally did it, and the way he wanted.*
**JOHN:** It would have been terrible if he died before that thing came to fruition.
**PAUL:** *I liked John. What I liked about*

**Here and the next page, two more of John's military illustrations.**

# a comic book, you have a job to do and you do it."

*the whole Australian comic thing, whenever I wrote to somebody, like yourself, everyone greeted me openly and really helped me out. I never went to art school; my art school was you and guys like Toth when he came over. It was a golden age. Now that you're not drawing comics anymore . . . could you see yourself drawing comic books?*

**JOHN:** I'll have to think about that.

**PAUL:** *The money's real good now.*

**JOHN:** I probably would once I got into it, as long as I didn't find myself caught up again in the same old trap. Although comic books . . . with a newspaper strip it's a continual thing, it goes on and on and on forever. With a comic book you have a job to do and you do it, and I think the deadlines probably wouldn't bother you quite so much. I don't know.

**PAUL:** *Well, you also have the chance if you're on a series or something to get off it and maybe do a different series, or not draw comics for awhile and do advertising jobs.*

**JOHN:** The storyboard business interests me — I've always been interested in the film medium. It's one of the most highly creative things I think you can do, is to be involved in filmmaking.

**PAUL:** *I'd like to end this John Dixon interview with a passage written by the late John Ryan from his book on Australian comics, PANEL BY PANEL, published by Angus Robertson's. Try and find a copy. It's well worth it.*

*"After serving a long apprenticeship in the comic-book field, John Dixon was able to break into the newspaper field in June 1959 with his AIR HAWK AND THE FLYING DOCTORS. The strip made its first appearance in the SUNHERALD followed two weeks later in the Perth WEEKEND MAIL and, later, in the Brisbane SUNDAY MAIL and the Adelaide SUNDAY MAIL. AIR HAWK has now completed a run of 20 years which is unprecedented for a locally-drawn continuity strip and a tangible comment on Dixon's skills as a comic-strip artist.*

*"Initially, AIR HAWK was the name of an air charter service operated by Jim Hawk, an ex-World War II fighter ace. The charter base was in Alice Springs and they worked in conjunction with the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Dr. Hal Matthews was a close friend of Jim Hawk who worked for the RFDS and Sister Janet Grant belonged to the Australian Inland Mission, whose medical clinic adjoined the air strip. In the mid-'70s, Jim Hawk was granted a franchise to supply a special Emergency Relief Unit. The Unit's function is to relieve any Flying Doctor Base in need of assistance and to be available for special emergencies. Hal Matthews has been seconded to work with the Unit and Janet Grant is now his full-time assistant. With the change in responsibilities the 'Doctors' part of the title has reverted to the singular.*

*"With his hero, Dixon has portrayed the tall, lean, suntanned, unflappable Australian of popular mythology and given him more technical skills than his legendary counterpart. Dixon scripts are well-written with plenty of action, drama, suspense, and characterization. AIR HAWK is played out against a background of cathedral-like ridges, barren landscapes, caverns, rivers and waterholes of the Outback country. The setting allows for the introduction of native fauna, Aborigines and their way of life and Dixon captures all of these with graphic authenticity.*

*While the strip acts as a continual reminder of the unique aspects of the RFDS, AIR HAWK is, above all, an aviation strip. A great deal of the strip's popularity stems from the amount of time-consuming detail that he exhibits in his drawings of a variety of aeroplanes. Apart from satisfying the readers' taste for realistically-drawn adventure, AIR HAWK offers the majority of its readers an opportunity to experience the far-off, exotic frontier of the rugged yet beautiful country. Dixon has taken care to see that his character has not strayed from his basic role of a flying adventurer and, though there is an obvious romantic attachment, has avoided requests that Jim and Janet marry."*

*Other artists who have worked on AIR HAWK over the years are: Mike Tabreit, Hart Amos, Paul S. Power, Phil Belbin and Keith Chatto.*

# LAST WORD

*Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001*

## FREELANCERS: MUSCLE BUT NO POWER (HOW'S THAT AGAIN —?)

Dear Dave;

Sorry, but you blew it. The inclusion of a single freelancer — *any* freelancer — immediately negates your "Power 100" list. Freelancers may be the muscle behind booming sales receipts for all the companies, big or small, but they have no power. None. Zero. Zilch. **Jim Lee** and **Rob Liefeld,** the current golden boys, have exactly as much power as Marvel lets them have. If you doubt this, consider the legalistic mire into which **Liefeld** thrust himself when he set about publishing his EXECUTIONER. Would Marvel rattle their corporate sabres at anyone with "power?" Would **Chris Claremont** be off the X-MEN if he had so much more "power" than **Bob Harras**? And would I be the one to depend on "when it comes to projects not getting done" if I had "power?"

So, try again, Dave. And start with the people who pull the purse strings. If **Terry Stewart** is number one, **Ron Perelman** must be some extraordinary number *higher* than one. The bean counters — even the very least of them — at Marvel *and* DC should hit your list long before anyone associated with actually *producing* the comics gets anywhere near it.

John Byrne

## GROTH RAISES HECK

Dear Dave +–

Just a short note to lodge a complaint against my Power Broker listing. If it's true that, as **Don Heck** states, I am capable of putting words into **Harlan Ellison's** mouth, I should clearly oust **Terry Stewart** from the #1 slot. I mean, does **Terry Stewart, Paul Levitz,** or **Mike Richardson** have the power to put words in **Harlan Ellison's** mouth?

Gary Groth
Fantagraphic Books
7563 Lake City Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

## WHERE'S SVEN(GALI)?

Dear David;

Having just read your one-hundredth issue (congratulations!) and consequently your Top One Hundred list, I'm certain that this will be the issue that generates the most mail you've ever received: Those people excluded wanting to know why they were excluded; those people who feel they were unjustifiably low on the list; those people who just plain resented there being a list! In my estimation, none of this matters. I have to assume that there were only two reasons you published this list: First, to sell more copies of your magazine; second, to get people talking about your magazine.

As I'm sure you know by now, you've succeeded in both.

I have to assume that these were the only two reasons you published the list because you illegitimized the concept of the Top One Hundred when you left off **Sven Larsen.** Sven has been in the Direct Sales department with me for two years now, and most currently held the position of Distributor Liaison. His work has been so exemplary that he was just recently given the position of Marketing Manager, key-stoning a whole new department at our company.

Besides his general, everyday work efforts as credence to his right to place in your Top 100, there are two very distinct reasons that can be pointed to as reasons that Sven should have been included on your list. In a company as big as Marvel, ideas usually come in the form of a seed from one person, are planted by another, are watered by still another, and then once the idea has sprouted from the soil into a plant, it is pruned into shape by yet another person. However, this year there were two ideas that can be wholly attributed to Sven. If retailers' cash registers could have placed votes, every time a copy was sold of the silver foil-embossed SILVER SURFER #50 or the glow-in-the-dark GHOST RIDER #15 the registers would have sung Sven's name in comics shops across the country!

I believe that there were quite a few people left off your list, and I could list them here. But by leaving Sven off of your list, when you consider the abstract of his day-to-day efforts in the industry and the concrete examples I've given of those efforts, you've proven to me that your list carries no credence and therefore there is no reason to consider the other missing candidates.

Congratulations again on your one-hundredth issue, and good luck on the next one hundred!

Lou Bank
Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
387 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

## FEAR & LOATHING AT FANTAGRAPHICS

Dear Dave,

I'm not entirely up on the rules of debate, but I think it's pretty safe to say that when one of the parties in an argument has been reduced to enjoining the other to "shut the fuck up," as **Paul Power** did to me in COMICS INTERVIEW #100, one of the two has come out ahead on points.

In any event, Terminator Paul utterly missed the point of my letter in #97, which was *not* a pissing contest as to whether AMAZING HEROES or COMICS INTERVIEW is the bigger sell-out for sucking up to X-Men-mania at every conceivable occasion. (AH probably does have the edge on that one right at the moment, but COMICS INTERVIEW's magnificent performance in the Batman Suck-Up Sweepstakes last year remains the run to beat.)

Look, I don't begrudge you or your interviewers the right to treat silly superhero comics or their equally silly writers and artists with respect. What bothered me, and bothers me still, is the fact that this respect slipped *only* when you were confronted by someone from the other side of the tracks, creatively speaking, namely **Chester Brown.** That your literary and artistic values are clearly of the kind that most intelligent, educated people would find infantile and moronic — and that you would certainly dismiss these people as effete snobs, arguing the Homeric quality of Superman and the Dickensian sweep of Spider-Man — this is all tangential. My question is, why do

you kiss everyone's ass but **Chester Brown's**? (And mine, I guess.) What's it about what Chester said that actually goaded you into the unprecedented, extreme of Taking A Position?

I'm beginning to think that no matter what everyone says, it's not the vitriol or the aggressiveness of THE COMICS JOURNAL that produces the fear and loathing Gary and I know so well (and, to be honest, relish): it's the magazine's basic message, namely that virtually every form of comics is superior to the debased, creatively (if not commercially) moribund avatar of the field, the mainstream superhero comic. Press that button and you guys blow up. Funny thing, really.

And, not incidentally: do you realize how berserk, and yet how typical, it is of you to "demote" **Alan Moore** because he's "more or less sworn off comics," when he is in fact probably at his peak of productivity, writing as he is three major series (BIG NUMBERS, FROM HELL, LOST GIRLS) as well as popping up in RAW and completing his first non-genre graphic novel with **Oscar Zarate**? Oh, but that's right — he hasn't been doing any stories about guys with costumes throwing punches at one another for any publisher with a corporate headquarters in New York City. Silly me. You're right, he might as well be dead; let's hope he wises up soon and does something significant again, like a Batman story.

Love and kisses
Kim Thompson
The 106th most powerful person in comics

*Hmm, Kim. I must have struck a nerve, since if you reread the editorial in question you'll find I didn't actually do any of the things you accuse me of nor say any of the words you put in my mouth. In CI #93 I acknowledge the validity and value of Chester Brown's work, and simply wonder if he is able to do the same when it comes to mainstream comics. For some reason, any suggestion that there might in fact be some value to mainstream work appears to send you into such a kneejerk frenzy that bystanders such as Paul Power find it irresistible to comment. It's your hot button that's obviously been pushed here, Kim, not ours.*

*Lastly, I can only conclude that while you carefully comb through COMICS INTERVIEW for any crumb to feed your loathing of mainstream comics, you apparently do not read THE COMICS JOURNAL with the same avidity, since Alan Moore himself "more or less swore off comics" in his interview there. Again, you are projecting your view onto us — then ad-libbing and attributing those interpretations to us, too.*

*If you want to invoke the rules of debate (a one-sided debate, I might add), you'd long since have been disqualified.*
*— DAK*

## HEY, KIM — LOOK! WE DO GO BEYOND MAINSTREAM COMICS!

Dear Dave:

I wanted to write to tell you that I did indeed pick up COMICS INTERVIEW #100 (by the way, congratulations on reaching this milestone!). I think it's safe to say that nobody will ever completely agree with the rankings, especially since it's always changing, as you yourself admitted in your introduction to the list. Your first several choices were probably right on the money, but it certainly gets more murky as the list goes on — there seems to be a fine line between who is really "powerful" (i.e., controls what products get into the marketplace) and who is merely "influential" or "popular" (i.e., sets trends for the industry). Does popularity really translate into power? More importantly, do those who are influential actually use this power? For example, although both **Tim Burton** and **Steven Spielberg** ranked high on the list, they have very little say on what actually gets published, and any influence they may exert on the field is indirect at best.

Ultimately, however, the biggest drawback in attempting to draw up such a list in the comics industry is that there are actually too few people involved in the decision-making process; how many real key players can there be in an industry where one company controls over 50% of the production and another controls over 50% of the distribution? The fan mentality has prevented comics readers from acting like responsible and educated consumers which would help change this imbalance.

On a more positive note, let me once again congratulate you on reaching issue #100. The one aspect of COMICS INTERVIEW that I have always appreciated is that you have consistently gone beyond mainstream comics and exposed readers to other aspects of the industry as well as to its history and to foreign artists. Seeing the interviews with **Enki Bilal** and **Alex Kotzky** was a delight! A real coup, however, would be a new interview with **Alex Toth!**

Randy Reynaldo
3765 Motor Ave., Suite 1121
Los Angeles, CA 90034

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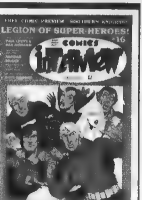


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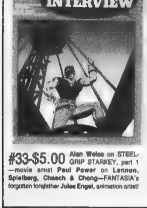


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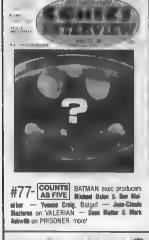


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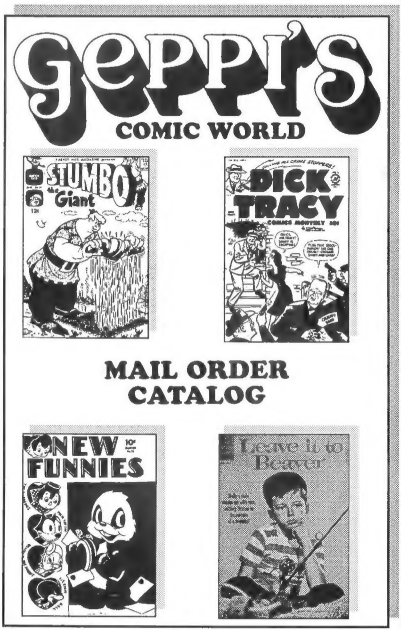

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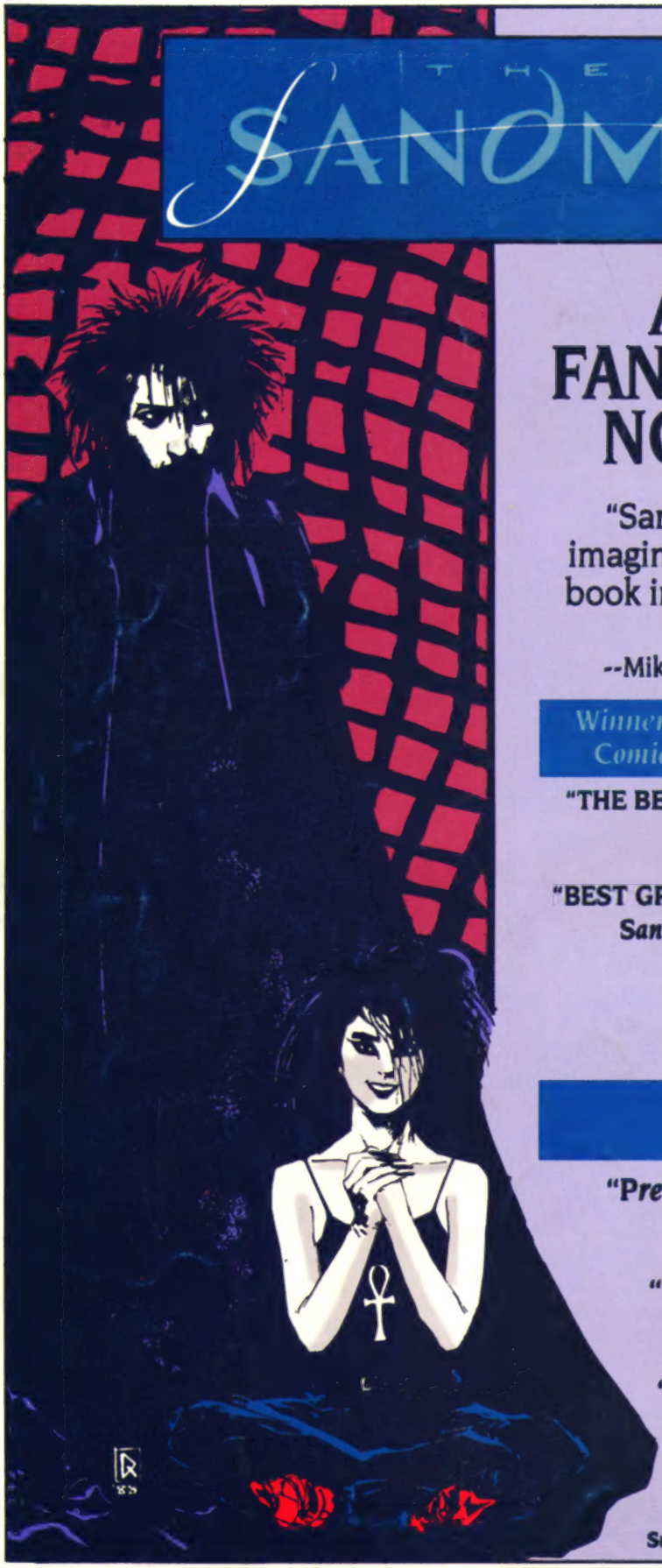


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